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BENGAL FAIRY TALES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

CHOTA NAGPORE

THE STORY OF AN INDIAN UPLAND

THE ROMANCE OF AN EASTERN CAPITAL

THROUGH PERSIA

'SYLHET' THACKERAY

TWELVE MEN OF BENGAL

THE MAN WHO WAS ENRICHED BY ACCIDENT

BENGAL FAIRY TALES

BY F. B. BRADLEY-BIRT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

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BENGAL FAIRY TALES

BENGAL FAIRY TALES

PART I

STORIES TOLD BY BHABAGHURAY, THE TRAVELLER

I

THE FOUR RIDDLES

AN Emperor of the olden days in India once sent a messenger to one of his tributary Rajas, Prithu by name, to ask him four questions. These were:—

1. Can there be poison in nectar?
2. Can there be nectar in poison?
3. Can there be a dog in human shape?
4. Is it possible for a donkey to rule a kingdom?

On the answering aright of these questions depended the tributary Raja's life, for the Emperor's order was that, in case of failure, the Raja should forfeit his head. The time granted to him for returning an answer was three months, and the first two months the Raja spent in fruitless endeavours to solve the riddles. The nearer the termination of the prescribed period approached the greater grew his anxiety and dread. At length he wrote the questions in big letters on a large sheet of paper, and tied it round the neck of a fast-going steed, with orders that he should be made to run throughout the whole Raj, and that if anybody on reading the paper could answer the questions he should be immediately brought to the court with promises of very rich rewards.

The plan the Raja had devised promised success, for within a short time there appeared before him a man named Golami who said that he knew the answers. But he would not give them save in the presence of the Emperor himself. Failing to solve the riddle himself, the Raja was forced to send for him to the imperial court. Golami further demanded a very large sum of money and the choicest jewels of great value, in order to bring the matter to a happy issue, and, being furnished with all that he desired, he started on his journey, which he accomplished in about a fortnight. He then hired one of the grandest houses in the Emperor's capital, kept a mistress, and ingratiating himself with the smartest and most fashionable characters there, opened his doors wide to all comers. Pleasure succeeded pleasure, entertainments of all kinds were given on the grandest scale and alms and loans generously distributed, so that Golami soon became one of the most popular men in the city.

Spending a week in this way, he one day called his friends to him, and said that he desired to marry, and that he depended upon their selection. They said that there was a bride, in every way worthy of him, who, however, would not in consequence of a vow listen to the proposal, except upon the receipt of twenty-five thousand rupees in advance. Golami at once loosened his purse-strings, and handed over the sum, not a pice of which, however, found its way into the girl's hands, the entire sum being divided among his false friends. To keep Golami still in their power, they found for him a girl of the vilest and most treacherous nature, and her he brought into his house as his wife, though he knew her to be a bad woman as soon as he cast eyes upon her.

On the third day after the marriage, Golami, who had been out, returned from his banker with a vast sum of money and some jewels and gems of the first water. These he had previously received from his employer, and had deposited in the bank. He showed them to his wife, and told her that they were the effects of a robbery perpetrated by him on a

merchant travelling along the highway, and that a royal proclamation had gone forth offering a rich reward to anyone giving information against him. He again went out on pretence of some business, and his wife, taking advantage of his absence, went to the police, and informed them against her husband. Though they had heard nothing of the robbery, or of any royal proclamation, they believed her when they came to know that she was the wife of the offender, and at once sent men with her for his arrest.

They found him at home waiting for the police, and they at once laid hold of him, and took him to the Emperor, who, instead of leaving the judgment of capital offences, of which highway robbery was one, in the hands of the judges appointed by him, took cognizance of them himself. And, after a mere formal trial, Golami was sentenced to death, and sent to prison to wait there till the moment of execution.

The fact was noised abroad, and the prisoner's former mistress, hearing of it, hastened to him and comforted him. She engaged counsel to defend her lover with all the money she had, and *Moulvis* to offer prayers for him. Not content with these services, she volunteered to remain in prison with him, if thereby she could in any way cheer him up.

Golami sent message after message to his friends, but they neither came to see him, nor sent a word of recognition. They had become his wife's lovers, and with her they merrily talked over his troubles.

At length the day of execution dawned. It happened also to be the last day of the three months allowed for the solution of the questions sent to Raja Prithu on which Golami was led in chains to the place where he was to be executed. There was a large crowd of spectators, in the midst of whom were his false wife and friends. The poor mistress, whose heart was breaking at the sad prospect before him, was waiting in a corner, with swimming eyes raised to the face of him whom she loved more than life. The block of wood, on which his

head was to be placed before the falling of the fatal axe, was ready and the Emperor arrived to give the final command.

But that command was not to be given, for the man under sentence of death cried out that he had a word for the ears of the Emperor, to whom it was of paramount importance. Being told to speak his thoughts, he said that they must be whispered in the Emperor's ears, so that others might not hear them. The Emperor, fearing some foul play, would not at first allow the near approach of him whom he had sentenced to death, but he was at length prevailed upon by the prime minister to do so. Golami, led close up to him, with his hands pinioned and his legs bound, brought his face near to the Emperor's ears and whispered, "I am no breaker of the law. I am as innocent as your Majesty. I was commissioned to answer the four questions you sent for solution to Raja Prithu. Will you permit me to give you the answers privately in your ear, or publicly so that your subjects may know them?"

The Emperor thinking that, if there was truth in what the man said, he had wronged him grievously, and that therefore it would be just to exonerate and even to reward him in public, bade Golami give the answers aloud. Thereupon the latter cried out, "Reverend Sire, here are the solutions of your questions. The answers I have found in my experiences here. As to the first question, 'Can there be poison in nectar?' Look at that ugly creature, superficially so attractive, waiting there to see me die. She is my wife, and instead of the nectar which I expected to find in her, I have found poison. To try her I gave out that I had committed a robbery, and thus made myself liable to be punished with death, and no sooner had she heard me than she sped to the police to denounce me.

"With regard to the second question, I have found nectar in a vessel of poison. That woman there, of evil repute, whose heart is supposed to contain poison, has been to me like life-giving nectar. She has done for me a service

as great even as that which a dutiful wife could have done.

"As to the third question, my false friends there are dogs in human form. They ate at my expense, even the morsels that I rejected were seized by them voraciously, and just as a dog licks the feet of its master, but, when rabid, bites him to death, so have these men flattered me, and when maddened by greed of money, and a desire to enjoy the uninterrupted companionship of the vile woman whom I made my wife, have rushed at me to bite me to death.

"And as to whether a donkey can possibly rule a kingdom, I pray your Majesty to look at yourself. You are an Emperor, but have you not proved yourself a donkey, in sentencing me to death before thorough investigation?"

The Emperor looked utterly abashed, and remained speechless. At length he invited Golami into the palace, entertained him for several days, and then sent him away with rich presents. But these were nothing in comparison with what Prithu gave him after his return. He bestowed upon him the half of his kingdom, and the hand of his daughter, though the bridegroom was a Mahomedan, and she a Hindu. Caste restrictions were not so strong then as in later times, and so it was not difficult for the Raja to reward his deliverer in this signal manner.

Our story ends here, for Bhabaghuray has not told us what afterwards befell the several actors in this drama.

II

PADMALOCHAN, THE WEAVER

THERE is a legend in Bengal, that weavers, as a class, are very stupid people, there being this peculiar element in their composition, that while very expert in matters of weaving and selling the products of their labour, they betray an extraordinary lack of common sense in every other respect.

Padmalochan was a weaver, and from what we have said, it is needless to add that he was a first-class dolt. One day, being at leisure, he was seated on his haunches at his door and regaling himself with the fumes of his *hooka*, when he beheld the well-known palmist of his village passing by. After the usual form of salutation, the weaver asked the palmist to tell him his fortune, especially calculating the time of his death. As, however, the reader of fortune made his living by his trade, and knew his customer to be too stingy to pay even a pice for his labour, he in ill-humour took up the weaver's right palm, and dropped it again in a second, saying that he would die the very moment a line of thread should pass out from behind his body. The parties then separated, the palmist to practise his art among those more liberal, and the weaver to work at his loom.

Several days passed after this prophecy concerning the weaver's time of exit from the world, when, as chance would have it, the thread round his shuttle got so entangled in his loin cloth, that it was difficult to extricate it. The more he tried to draw it out, the more did it lengthen itself, till at last, being sure that this was the fulfilment of the prophecy

PADMALOCHAN THE WEAVER

concerning his death, he rolled on the ground, lamenting in the bitterest terms his untimely departure from the world, and the subsequent wretchedness of his dear wife, whom he must leave a helpless widow. His lamentations grew so loud that they drew his better half to the scene. She, who had been apprised of the palmist's calculation, was beyond herself with grief, and fell by her husband's side, railing against the gods for this unjust and cruel visitation that they were inflicting upon them. Her shrieks quickly brought the neighbours to her side. They also were weavers, and not a whit more sensible than the afflicted couple, and when they saw Padmalochan in that unhappy state, they could not forbear shedding tears of sympathy. The man himself was naturally of an imaginative turn of mind, and in fancy he went through all the agonies of death, omitting not even the last gasp. Then when he seemed motionless, his wife and friends supposed that the soul had taken flight, and they at once engaged themselves in making preparations for the obsequies. Bundles of wood with a very sparse quantity of *ghee* to be rubbed on the supposed corpse before placing it on the funeral pile, and incense to be thrown into the fire to make a sweet odour, were prepared, and the sympathetic neighbours set out for the place of cremation in a deserted locality, many miles distant from their village. They carried on their shoulders their friend's body, wrapped in a mat and tied to a bamboo, and leaving the city behind them they reached the middle of a field, when it was near midnight. There were several footpaths marked in the field, and the benighted men did not know which to take. They were at their wits' ends, and commenced arguing on the point. The disagreement took the form of a quarrel, until at last Padma, so long silent in fancied death, could no longer hold his tongue. He cried out, "Friends, I know well the way to the burning *ghat;* and I would gladly tell you in which direction to go, if my tongue were not tied by Yama."

Hearing him speak, his friends were greatly frightened,

for they thought it was a *Dano*, an evil spirit that, taking possession of a corpse, speaks and acts like the man whose dead body it has entered. Hastily throwing the body down, they ran away as fast as they could, and did not look behind until they reached the inhabited quarters of the city.

In the meantime, Padma disengaged himself from his bonds, and in spite of his bruised body managed to climb up a *peepul* tree near by, in order to secure himself from jackals, and other dangerous wild beasts. He imagined that he really was a *Dano*, but still he could not but obey his human instincts. After some time sleep was about to seal his eye-lids and he had begun to doze when, as chance would have it, there came to the foot of the tree a band of house-breakers, abroad on a plundering excursion. One of Padma's legs was hanging down, and it touched the head of one of the thieves, who instantly gave it so strong a pull that it brought him down to the ground. The house-breakers, superstitious like other illiterate men, thought it must be some superhuman being who had waylaid them, and in great dread they asked him who he was. It was necessary to give them some answer, and Padma thought it best to give it in a nasal tone, for he knew that no evil spirit can talk except through his nose. In a nasal tone, therefore, he told them his whole history, particularly, of course, of his having died, and of the *Dano's* advent into his body. The men to whom he talked were not such block-heads as to believe him, and they realized that he was a fellow stupid enough to be made their cat's-paw in any daring enterprise. So they invited him to follow them, telling him at the same time, who and what they were. He gladly accepted the invitation and accompanied them.

The field was soon crossed, and a town showing all the signs of opulence was reached. On the side of a river near it, there was a professional drummer's cottage, through the walls of which the house-breakers made a hole big enough for a man to pass. It is according to the code in force among

house-breakers that one of the perpetrators of the crime should make the first entrance, and if the coast is clear, inform his fellows of it, either by some signs from inside, or by coming out, at the same time carrying away anything within his reach. Acting according to their code, but unwilling to risk themselves, the house-breakers in question induced Padma to make the first entrance, telling him at the same time to bring away with him the most valuable things he could lay hands on, the most valuable thing probably being the heaviest thing within reach. He entered the room into which the hole led, and finding nobody there, commenced seeking something heavy, with which he might return to his companions. He found a curry-stone, one of the heaviest things in a Bengali's house, and so he took this and went out with it as if it were precious booty. The thieves laughed at his stupidity, and sent him a second time through the hole, telling him that the most valuable things in a cottage like the one before them were not only heavy, but sonorous also, meaning thereby brass or bell-metal utensils. He waited for no further instructions, and hopeful of success went back into the room, where in a corner he found something large and heavy, and to see if it gave any sound, he commenced beating it with his palm. It was a drum and it gave forth its *Chatak*, *chatak*, *taktaksin* sound so loud through the whole house, that the inmates were awakened. Startled, they lit their lamps, and entered the room where they beheld the novice in theft playing on the drum in great glee. Asked who he was, and why he was there in that position, he made a clean breast of everything. Some strong male members of the family opened the outer door, in order to apprehend the robbers, but none of them were to be found, for they had all decamped at the first sign of danger. The poor weaver looked blank, and the men were disposed to let him off. They offered to take him home, but he did not consent, for fear that, as he was a *Dano*, his presence would bring pollution to his house, and

misfortune on her who remained there, the dear wife to whom he was still devoted. He therefore volunteered to go about with them as a drummer, so that by entertaining the gods and goddesses with his performances, he might be rewarded with a life more blessed and happier than that of a *Dano*. The men acceded to his request, but what happened to him in the future Bhabaghuray has not yet told us, and until he does we must remain in ignorance.

III

BUDHIBANTA, THE BOY WEAVER

IN a certain village in rural Bengal there lived a young weaver, Budhibanta by name. He had a mother to whom he was very obedient. The power of judging for himself was not to be found in him, and he did everything his mother told him to do. He was married, but his wife was too young to leave her father's house, and live in her husband's. It was necessary, however, that husband and wife should sometimes meet, and so one day our hero's mother wished him to visit his better half. But how the weak and foolish boy would behave in society was a source of anxiety to his mother. She at length thought that it would be best to send her son with a friend, as his protector and guide, after giving him some good advice, and accordingly, on the most auspicious day named by the village astrologer, Budhi left home with his friend and the parting instructions of his mother, which were to bow deeply to any grave-looking lady of his father-in-law's house, for there were several ladies there who were worthy of his respect; to put as much food into his mouth as could be taken up with only five fingers, that is, to eat as little food as possible, for to appear greedy in one's father-in-law's house was an inexcusable indecency; and to take the shortest and the most direct path when returning home alone, for his friend might not find it convenient to wait during the whole time he might be detained by his mother-in-law.

With these words of advice stored in his mind, and his friend Juggo accompanying him, he reached his destination,

and was at once taken into an inner apartment, where he beheld, though at a distance, his veiled wife, who appeared anxious to avoid him, according to the immemorial custom of her country that no girl wife should show her face to her lord before marriage. Running towards her, he bowed low to her, touching her feet with his forehead. This made every one in the house titter, but unconscious of his stupidity, he went in, squaring his chest and bearing himself proudly.

Sometime afterwards, a dish containing fruits and sweets was laid before him, and he could without difficulty put each of these into his mouth, agreeably to his mother's advice. But when the noon-day meal was served, being naturally voracious, he invoked the most fearful curses on his mother's head, on account of the restraint her commands enjoined upon him.

The day passed without anything noteworthy happening, and at night, when the last meal was served, he was in the same predicament as at dinner, or even in a greater, for the dish before him was then *khichuri*, a mixture of boiled rice and pulse, seasoned with *ghee* and spices. The greater portion of the food was liquid, and poor Budhi was at a loss to discover how to quiet the cravings of hunger. But his mother's command was his law, and with great regret he was forced to leave most of the dish uneaten.

Finally the whole house retired for the night. Budhi, of course, was in the same room with his wife, and his friend was in the room in the outer apartments. The wife, too young to enter into a long conversation with him, soon fell asleep; but the burning of his empty stomach kept him awake, and, on tiptoe, he crept out into the room occupied only by his friend. He roused him, and with tears informed him of his distress. Together he and his friend began searching about the room, with the result that they found a trap-door leading into a room below. Budhi bent his head to try and see if there was any food there, and to his delight he saw a *harhi* full of molasses. He got down through the

trap-door, by means of a rope tied round his waist, asking his friend to draw him up when he felt a jerk. Greedily he disposed of the contents of the *harhi* and many handfuls of rice which he found close by. Then taking the *harhi* still more than half full of molasses on his head and a bundle of rice in his right hand, with the intention of hiding them somewhere and appeasing his hunger on future occasions, he gave the signal to his friend. The latter felt a jerk on the rope and began pulling it up, but the weight of Budhi and of the things he was carrying was too much for it, and it snapped, throwing the greedy wretch to the floor, his whole body smeared with molasses mixed with rice. He greatly feared that the house might awake, owing to the noise his fall had made, so in order to scare them away, his brain, dull in useful matters, but prolific in mischievous plans, quickly evolved a scheme, which was to impersonate a ghost by uttering aloud some indistinct nasal sounds. The plan was carried out, and the inmates of the house, believing that an evil spirit was the sole actor in the scene, could not call up courage enough to enter the storeroom, and one of them ran to the *Rojhah*, the exorcist, and called him in. The *Rojhah* muttered some charms and entered the room, when Budhi, to make the scene more terrible, rushed towards him with gaping mouth. This was too much for the exorcist, and he fainted. The whole house was in dismay: women tore their hair in anguish and the men were paralysed. At length Budhi's wife, aroused from her heavy sleep, left her room, and joined them with the report that her husband was not in their room. This increased the uneasiness of her people, for they thought that he had been spirited away; and not only the women, but the men even cried aloud at the mishap.

The friend, Juggo, was awake all the while, but he remained silent. Up till then, he had not thought it advisable to betray the secrets of his friend, but when he saw that the scene was painful beyond endurance, he revealed the facts of the case, and the whole house rang with the noise of laughter.

Nothing like this had happened in their experience before, and they were all much amused. The excitement being over, they crowded into the pantry, and found our hero sitting on his haunches, and grinning at the alarm he had caused. They washed him clean, made him change his clothes, and cracked jokes at him, but he still remained puffed up with pride at the consternation he had caused.

Next morning the matter was forgotten; and the attentions the son-in-law received were as usual. His relations by marriage pressed him to remain with them a few days more, but Juggo, disgusted with the night's occurrence, took leave of his friend, and returning home, told Budhi's mother of his folly. His mother was greatly distressed on her son's account, and anxiety for his safe return made her very miserable. She trembled with fear, lest he, having no protector but himself, should run into danger, and finally she made up her mind to go to his father-in-law's house, and bring her darling home, even though, according to the custom of her country, it was not the correct thing to do. She had the most favourable day pointed out to her on the almanac by a Brahmin, and started on her journey. But that journey she was not destined to complete, for having passed over about half the distance she found her son lying dead a little way off from the beaten path. It can be easily conceived what a shock she received at the sight. Wild with grief, she beat her head against the ground, tore her hair, uttered cries of lamentation that rent the air, and sang a dirge of the thousand and one good traits of her son's character.

She was, however, gifted with a strong mind, and so she soon collected herself and began to think of the removal of the body for cremation. She returned home to bring her neighbours to the spot, in order that they might help her to perform the last duties to her son, and in a short time, nothing remained of poor Budhibanta on earth save a heap of ashes.

No one at the time knew the cause of the boy's death. But the narrator of the story by means of later inquiries

ascertained the circumstances under which the tragic event had happened, and from him we have heard that the poor weaver was returning home that same morning, when on reaching a palmyra-tree, where two roads branched off in different directions, he feared that by taking the longer one by accident he would be acting contrary to his mother's advice to take the shortest path, and he therefore climbed up to the top of the tree to get a view of the two roads. Having done so he laid hold of one of the branches, and swung himself down so as to fall on his feet on the other side of it, whereupon one of the Fatal Sisters attempted to cut the thread of his life as he fell. His feet touched the head of a man underneath him mounted on an elephant. The man laid hold of our hero's feet, and the elephant moved quickly away. It was a terrible sight, Budhi hanging from the top of the palmyra-tree, with the new-comer dragging him down, but the weaver, too stupid to understand the danger of the position, began interrogating his companion in distress who he was, whence he had come, and to whom the elephant belonged. The man, aware of their dangerous position, hastily exclaimed, "I have never seen such a fool as you. Both of us are on the point of death, and instead of calling on the gods, you indulge yourself in frivolous talk. Don't disturb me, I am calling on *Ma Kali* to save me."

But the foolish Budhi only laughed. "Ha, ha, that's no use," he said. "Your life is in my hands. Refuse to answer, and I will let go my hold. You know what that means."

The other man was naturally furious. "What a pest you are!" he exclaimed. "There is no escape from you, however. So listen. I am a blind man, and have hitherto lived on my earnings as a singer. Last evening I entertained the king of this place with my songs, and he feasted me during the night, and dismissed me this morning with the elephant you have seen. Now you are satisfied, I hope. Trouble me no more."

"Not yet, my friend," said Budhi. "I must hear the song

that brought you so valuable a reward. You had better begin singing at once."

But the man protested. "I entreat you to spare me," he said. "Don't draw me away from my meditations."

"You can't escape me so easily," replied Budhi. "Remain silent a minute longer, and I will let go my hold. See, I am just on the point of doing so."

"Hear the song, then," exclaimed the unfortunate man, "and then go to the infernal regions."

Saying this, the man began to sing. After he had sung for about a minute, the foolish Budhi took his hands off the branch to clap them in approval, whereupon down fell both of them with a tremendous thud, and their souls were carried to the feet of Yama. Some of the blind man's friends in the palace chanced to be passing that way a little after the occurrence, and they removed his body to dispose of it with fitting funeral rites; but the body of the weaver, who was a perfect stranger to them, they left lying where they found it. A fool has no honour even in his death.

IV

KHOODEH, THE YOUNGEST BORN

ONCE upon a time, there was a family of seven brothers, six of whom were married, while Khoodeh, the youngest, remained single. They did not form a joint family, the brothers living independently of one another. Khoodeh had been his father's favourite and to him he had left the greater part of his possessions in coins and *cowries*. Khoodeh was on this account hated by his brothers. Their means of livelihood were precarious, while Khoodeh lived in comfort. One day, filled with spite and jealousy, they resolved to make away with him, and they cunningly devised a scheme to carry out their intentions. They asked Khoodeh if he would marry, and though he had seen enough to suspect them of treachery, he replied thus to them, "My elder brothers! I regard you as worthy of as much veneration as my father. Look out for a wife for me."

A few days passed, and Khoodeh's brothers one morning falsely told him that a girl had been found for him. They further said that very night had been fixed for the wedding and that they must all proceed to her father's house in the evening. Khoodeh pretended to be filled with joy and gratitude and made the necessary preparations for the supposed happy occasion. He knew that his brothers were making ready a pitfall for him, but he did not care, for he was sure of outwitting them. The time for departure came, and the brothers proceeded towards the fictitious house of the fictitious bride. A river had to be crossed, and as they drew near it, Khoodeh managed to fall behind his brothers and escape

their notice for a moment. He hurriedly ran towards a cow-herd, whom he had seen driving home the cows in his charge, and asked him if he would care to marry. The swain grinned wide at the question, and answered in the affirmative; and our hero quickly took off his own wedding clothes, and exchanged them for those of the cow-herd, telling him to approach the wedding party, imitate his benefactor's voice, and under cover of the darkness of the evening, impersonate him. The deluded creature did as directed. The brothers took him into a boat with the ostensible object of crossing the river, but in reality to drown him. When the boat reached the middle of the river, they callously cast him into it, under the conviction that it was Khoodeh himself.

Khoodeh in the meantime had driven the cows into the yard of his house, and when his brothers returned, they saw him cooking his evening meal. Their surprise on seeing alive and well the man whom they believed they had thrown into the river and drowned, was as great as can be imagined. But great as their surprise was, they did not lose their impudence, and exclaimed, "Alas! brother Khoodeh, the boat received a terrible shock, and you, the gem of our eyes, fell out. We tried much to save you, but our attempts were vain. Broken-hearted we have returned home. Come, let us hold you close to our hearts. By the bye, where have you got the cows from?"

"I thank heaven for sparing me, and thus saving you from the pangs of bereavement," replied Khoodeh. "Just as I was being carried by the waves underneath the surface of the river, I found one of these cows swimming close by, and got on its back. Reaching dry ground, I met a being full of effulgence, who must be a god, beckoning me from a short distance away, and when I drew near he said, 'Say "*hai*" seven times, and each time a cow will come up from the water and place itself at your disposal.' I obeyed him and thus got the eight cows which you see."

Khoodeh's brothers went away very much dejected at their

KHOODEH THE YOUNGEST BORN

failure. The means they had adopted for his destruction had made him rich in the possession of eight milch cows. What more could they do? They racked their brains to find a solution of the question, and ultimately resolved to burn him alive by setting fire to his house the next night. The object of their evil intentions, however, by some means or other, guessed what was brewing, and spent the night chosen by the incendiaries for the crime, away from home. His house, however, was reduced to heaps of charcoal and ashes during his absence. But he was not the man to submit to misfortune without attempting to turn it to the best advantage. Returning home, he collected the charcoal, and, putting it into two large gunny-bags, which he placed on the back of one of his cows, one bag on each side, he started for the market for the ostensible purpose of selling their contents.

He knew well that the sale would fetch very little, so he did not really go to the market at all, but roamed about on the look out for further adventure. The day, however, passed unprofitably, and in the evening he retired to a *Chati*. There he found a man with a cow loaded in the same way as his. In course of conversation, he asked his companion what his bags contained, and was told that they were filled with rupees. Being asked what the contents of his bags were, Khoodeh said that they were gold mohurs. Now this was a most successful cast of his dice, for when he was asleep the other man, who could hardly close his eyes during the night on account of the itching in his fingers to make the gold mohurs his own, got up long before the dawn, and drove away Khoodeh's cow with the bags of charcoal on it, leaving his own behind.

Khoodeh was prepared for the success of his ruse, so getting up at dawn, he drove the cow with the money home, reaching it before his brothers were awake. Their wives, however, had left their rooms, and were engaged in their morning duties. Unburdening the cow, and pouring down the money on the floor of his sleeping room as noiselessly as

possible, he got from one of his sisters-in-law a corn measure to see how many rupees he had. But he kept the purpose secret in order to have a greater surprise ready for his relations. Measure after measure he deposited the coins in his chest, leaving at length a single rupee sticking to the bottom of the measure so that at sight of it his brothers and their wives might be thrown into a sea of curiosity, on knowing that he had had so much money that a measure was required to ascertain its amount. What he had anticipated came to pass, and his brothers, with jealousy and confusion on their faces, came to him and asked him how he had become the master of so much money that it could not be conveniently counted, but estimated only by the measure used for the purpose of measuring corn. He enjoyed their chagrin and confusion, replying, "You see, brothers, I am the favourite of the gods, and my good fortune turns misfortune into blessings. My house caught fire, and with the two bags of charcoal I have earned as many bags of rupees."

"Dear Khoodeh," the brothers hastened to answer, "do tell us how this happened. If feasible, we shall follow your plan and make ourselves rich for life."

"I have obtained the money in the easiest way," he replied. "A dozen miles off, there is a town where charcoal is so valued that the people there pay for a bag of it an equally capacious bag of rupees. I went there and they eagerly closed the bargain with me. I advise you to burn your houses and go to the town to-morrow morning, and while passing along its streets you must, as I did, bawl out, 'A bag of charcoal goes for an equally large bag of rupees.'"

Here Khoodeh gave an imaginary description of the fictitious town. And his brothers, as silly as they were covetous, set fire to their houses that very night. Next morning, six heaps of charcoal were put into twelve bags, and the six brothers with as many cows, borrowed from their neighbours, and loaded up with two bags each, proceeded in the direction pointed out by Khoodeh. At length they

entered a town, and believing it to be the same as that which their brother had spoken of, they commenced crying at the top of their voices: "Here are twelve bags of the best charcoal, to be sold for as many bags of equal size filled with rupees." This was enough to overwhelm them with the ridicule of the people whose houses they passed, and the latter, forming a crowd around them, began to shower abuse upon them and cast handfuls of dust at them. When they vociferously demanded to know what all this meant, they were well thrashed with shoes, and thrust out of the town.

Thus ended their enterprise, and crestfallen they returned home. But what was home to them who were now houseless? On meeting their wives, they beat their heads and breasts with their hands, and told them their doleful story. Loud lamentations were uttered by the six families, bereft of shelter over their heads and of all their other possessions that they had by their own hands turned into ashes. To make the best of so unfortunate a position, they built temporary sheds thatched with palmyra leaves, and engaged themselves as day labourers to the solvent farmers of their village. Their attitude towards Khoodeh was changed. Though deep hatred rankled in their hearts, they could not any longer dream of molesting him, for they knew that he was far above them in wealth and wisdom. It was to their interest, under the circumstances, to gain his favour, and, sycophants that they were, they constantly approached him to curry favour. He was liberal minded, and not only did he forget the ill usage he had received from them, but opened his purse-strings for their relief. In short, after heaping coals of fire on their heads, he brought them, if not to love him—for love was foreign to their nature—at least to look up to him with respect and awe.

Khoodeh, rich beyond his expectations, married a good wife, and entered into speculations which soon made him the wealthiest man in his country. Secure in his high position, he invited his brothers to come and live with him. They

eagerly availed themselves of the offer, and lived dependent on him whom they had once planned to destroy. He, however, did not in any way give them occasion to feel their unfortunate position. He was full of kindness to them, and took them as partners in his speculations without their paying a single pice in the shape of capital; for he well knew how poor they were. In time, however, they too became rich, and Khoodeh's and his brothers' families became the most honoured people in the country, living happily together in the full enjoyment of unclouded good fortune. He who is really strong and great does not find it difficult to forgive the small and evil minded.

V

LUCKHINARAIN, THE IDIOT

THERE once lived a Brahmin, respected as both learned and well-to-do. He was blessed with a wife and a young son, named Luckhinarain. Unfortunately, however, the latter in time grew into a young man so thick-headed that the like of him had never been seen before. But in spite of this his mother had a very high opinion of his intelligence, and she often quarrelled with her husband, who, knowing his son only too well, never gave him credit for even the least spark of common sense.

The Brahmin one day desired to give a feast to his neighbours, and in the morning he set out to invite them, instructing his wife meanwhile to prepare the food. Believing her son to be a clever bargainer, though he had never purchased anything in his life, she gave him a rupee and told him to fetch some live fish worth eight annas and some *tari-tarkari* (green vegetables) at the same price. He went to the Bazar, and bought some twenty fish with half a rupee; and then the question how to send them home puzzled his brain. He would not hire a coolie, for that would entail on his mother an additional expense. He rejected the idea of carrying them home himself, for that would not look well for one of his position. What was to be done with them? His prolific brain soon solved the difficulty. There was a canal flowing between the market and his house, and whispering to the fishes where the latter was, he threw them into the canal with orders that they should stop at the ghat close to his house

and remain there till he came to take them up. The reader need not be told how far he was obeyed. Successful in his first purchase, he was about to make the second when it struck him that he did not know what *tari-tarkari* meant, and that he should have asked his mother what it was. But he was soon relieved of this trouble when a potter came to the Bazar to sell a basketful of *kalkays*.[1] He danced with delight at the thought that the *tari-tarkari* he sought was at hand, and bought as many of the kalkays as could be had for eight annas. With them he went homewards, and reaching the ghat looked for the fishes, and not finding them, rent the air with abuse. He then entered the house and made a display of his purchases. When asked about the fish, he related what had happened. His parents were dumbfounded. At length the father's temper rose, and he cursed his son, which roused his wife's wrath. The feast had to be put off, for it was now midday, and no fish, essential to a Bengali meal, was available. What could the Brahmin do, but go back to the invited guests, and, relating the unpleasant circumstances, ask them to excuse him for the mishap. He arranged with them, however, another day for their entertainment.

On the evening that immediately preceded the day fixed, the Brahmin visited his prospective guests, and again invited them to dine at his house. Next day he was too tired to go to the milkman's to order *dahi* (curd) without which no dinner is complete. He wanted to send his servant for the purpose, but the man had been commissioned by his wife on some other errand, so either the Brahmin had to go himself, or send his son. Remembering what had happened previously he was loath to depute the fool, so giving up all thoughts of rest, he was placing his *chadar* on his shoulders in order to set out, when his wife came in, and, in great sympathy for his weariness, recommended that Luckhinarain be entrusted with the mission. This her husband strongly opposed, reminding her how her dear son had spoiled every-

[1] The bowl for holding the tobacco in a hooka.

thing on the former occasion. But the mother, unreasonably prepossessed in the young man's favour, would not listen to contradiction, and at last persuaded the Brahmin to accept her proposal. The young hopeful, being told what was wanted of him, bragged a good deal of his own efficiency, and with the eight-anna bit his mother gave him as earnest money for the dahi, he started off for the milkman's house. But fate had destined that he should not get there. On the way he met the elephant belonging to the *rajah* of the place, which was being led to the river for its bath. And as he had never mounted an elephant, though he had always pictured it as his ideal of happiness, he could not resist the temptation of obtaining a ride by paying the *mahout* the money he had with him. While seated on the back of the animal, he assumed a ludicrous gravity of countenance, which made him the laughing-stock of the crowd that soon assembled around him, and some of the urchins who knew him bawled out, "There goes Luckhinarain, the Brahmin, on the rajah's elephant," and threw handfuls of dust at him.

Having enjoyed himself to his heart's content, he returned home, quite unconcerned at his neglect of duty. With a bold face he told his mother that the earnest money had been paid to the milkman, and that the requisite quantity of dahi would be brought the next morning at nine o'clock. The poor woman believed him, though his father had great doubts as to the truth of his assertion. The morning came, and it was ascertained by the sun's position that it was nine o'clock, but no supply of dahi had come. In great anxiety Luckhi's mother asked him what the delay meant, and was peremptorily told to wait. Two hours passed, to the great uneasiness of his parents, and yet the milkman did not appear. The old Brahmin was on the tenter-hooks of suspense, and his wife in no better condition, when Luckhi, with sombre looks, went unknown to them into the pantry, took out some tamarind, entered the *goshala*, and made the cows eat the tamarind. In a quarter of an hour he visited the cows again with a *karay*,

an earthen pot used to contain milk, and began to squeeze their teats, in the hope that the tamarind had congealed the milk in them into curd. The reader can well imagine what success he had. His mother coming into the cowshed and seeing how he was engaged, asked him to explain himself. Without deigning to reply he said, "What wonder! the gods, I see, are against me. The course of nature seems to be altered. A thousand times have I witnessed that a little tamarind has caused a large quantity of milk to set, but now I find that a seer of this sour substance has failed to answer my purpose."

"Wretched idiot, what are you saying?" his mother exclaimed. "Explain yourself. It is almost time for the guests to come. Go, run to the milkman for the curd."

"Don't call me wretched. You, your father, your mother, and your cows are wretched. I never went to the milkman with your orders. Why should I do so, when I knew it was superfluous? Many a time you have curdled milk with tamarind, and I thought that I would do the same in the present case. You can't blame me."

This was said in so loud a voice, that Luckhi's father was drawn to the spot, and hearing the last few words of his son's speech, he was quite beside himself with rage. Both parents, after pouring execrations on their son's head, asked him what he had done with the pice given him, to which he petulantly replied, "What have I done with the money? With it I gained such honours as neither you nor your ancestors to the fourteenth generation have achieved. I rode on the rajah's elephant, to the admiration and awe of the whole neighbourhood. And you should rejoice at the good fortune of your son."

The father's indignation was beyond bounds. Curd was something that could not be had off-hand, and without it no meal would be complete. He deeply felt his awkward position. Thinking, however, that a dinner wanting a particular dish was better than none, he awaited his guests.

But he could not bear the presence of his son in the house, and so, in spite of his wife's intercession, he turned him out, saying that the house should never receive him again. What his after-career was, Bhabaghuray has not yet informed us, so we must take leave of him here for the present.

VI

THE FOUR SWINDLERS

ONCE, in a certain country, there was a king who was on terms of intimate friendship with his prime minister, the chief merchant, and the *kotál*. Each of them had a son, and the four young men were great friends. They were very intelligent and learned, and being desirous of completing their education by travelling, they started on an auspicious day for foreign countries. Reaching the kingdom nearest to their own, they heard of its king's fame for justice, and of his keen insight in dispensing it. Being curious to prove the correctness of the report, they resolved to enter his kingdom in disguise, carry on a series of swindles, and see how he detected and punished them.

There was a river on the outskirts of his dominions, which had to be crossed before entering them. The young men, on reaching it, found a boy in charge of the ferry boat. They got into it as passengers, and on inquiry learnt from him that his father had just gone home to snatch a hasty meal, and that he was acting for him. This knowledge was fully utilized by them. They crossed the river, and on landing each gave the boy a *cowrie*, which was not a current coin. He, as was natural, refused to take these as his remuneration, whereupon the four friends said, "Well, you say your house is on the road which we shall have to pass. Come with us, and when we are near your house, you may call out to your father that we have given you four bad cowries. If he protests against it, you may compel us to pay you to your satisfaction."

The boy agreed to this, and when they came near his home

cried out, "Father, four men have crossed the river, and paid me four bad cowries." The intimation was so ambiguously worded, according to the dictation of the friends, that the ferry-man understood that in the cowries his son had received, there were four that were bad, and so he thought little of the matter. But when he came to the *ghat* and learnt from his son the whole story, he found that he had been imposed upon, and he instantly reported the matter to the king, so that he might know of the arrival of swindlers within his dominions.

The friends, having proceeded further, saw a confectioner's shop, and finding there a man acting as its master, whose very features betrayed that he was a first-class idiot, they proposed to play a trick on him, similar to that which they had played upon the ferry-man's son. Entering the shop, they ordered some good *sandesh*[1] and ate as much of it as they could. Then, in the course of their conversation with the man, they learnt that not he, but his brother, Juggo, who was then absent, was the owner of the shop. Hearing the name, they said that Juggo was their old friend, and pretended great sorrow at not being in time to meet him. When the man in the shop asked their names, they said they were known as *Machees*.[2] The conversation having come to an end, they got up from their seats, and were about to leave, when they were asked for the price of the sweetmeats. At this they burst into a laugh, patted the man on the back, and said, "You are Juggo's younger brother, and so ours, and we bless you from our hearts. If our friend were here, he would not let us depart so soon, but would force us to be his guests for weeks and weeks. To spare you reproaches from him, we do not like to pay you anything, for if he learns on returning that you have taken money for the sweetmeats supplied to his beloved Machees, he will be very cross with you. Give him our best love, and say that we intend seeing him on our return." The poor deluded man, on his brother's arrival home, found that he had been cheated. The village *Chaukidar* was

[1] One of the best Indian sweetmeats. [2] Flies.

informed of the swindle, and he of course reported the matter to his superiors, and they to the king.

It was manifest, therefore, to the people of the capital that swindlers had found their way into the kingdom, and the king instructed the police to be on the alert. The friends had in the meantime reached the capital, and were making preparations to begin swindling on a grand scale. They had cheated two men, the ferryman and the confectioner, who were illiterate and stupid, but that was nothing in comparison with what they were meditating. At the chief seat of Government the four foremost families were the king's, the prime minister's, the chief merchant's, and the kotál's, and these they selected as their intended victims. Each of the friends was to practise his art of deception on the family of equal rank to his own. In a short time they became masters of the secrets of these families, and began their work, each taking his turn.

First came the turn of the prime minister's son. He on inquiry learnt that his father's equal in the kingdom had a young married daughter, in the full bloom of youth and beauty, whose husband had never visited her after their marriage. With the object of playing her husband's part, and thus defrauding her father of much jewellery and other valuables, the minister's son one evening called at the house of his intended victim, and introduced himself as his son-in-law. The old man was not in a position to judge whether the young man was in reality his daughter's husband or not, for he had not seen the latter since the marriage many years before. But in the circumstances, there was no reason for doubt, since no stranger was likely to venture to make such a pretension.

The prime minister, accordingly, received his supposed son-in-law with great cordiality. The good news was received in the *Zenána*, which in celebration of the joyous event resounded with the noise of conch-shells and *ulús*.[1] Great

[1] Musical sounds that Bengali women make on joyous occasions by moving their tongues inside their mouths.

festivities took place, after which the pseudo son-in-law was shown to his apartments, and the ladies busied themselves in decorating the prime minister's daughter as gaily as possible. When she was bedecked to their satisfaction, they took the bashful girl, trembling with emotion, into her husband's apartments and left her with her supposed lord, who on seeing her, became a prey to diverse feelings—admiration at the beauty of the girl before him, pity at the ruse he was practising on the innocent creature, and fear of succumbing to temptation. But however intense his feelings, they soon yielded to his desire for success in the enterprise. Assuming a false gravity and sadness, he thus addressed the girl, "I see you do not value me in the least. Well, I deserve this for not having seen you so long. But surely these are not your best garments. Your jewels are of the poorest kind. This is an insult to me. I will never again touch the threshold of this house, until I can make you fitting presents."

The girl was much affected by this tirade. Sobbing she ran out of the room to her mother, who, on hearing her report, brought out the most precious gems in the house, and bedecking her with them, led her back to her husband's apartments and left her there. Her supposed husband, in order to avoid making any such overtures as might afterwards give rise to scandal, feigned to feel unwell and very drowsy, and fell into a pretended sleep. The girl therefore could not do otherwise than fall asleep too. It was during the small hours of the morning, when dead silence still reigned over the whole house, that the young man quietly rose up, removed the jewels and the rich clothes from the girl's body, and tying them in a small bundle, made towards the gate, and under pretence of some unavoidable and urgent business outside, deceived the guard, and showed a clean pair of heels. Before dawn he met his friends in the house they had hired, and they heartily congratulated him on the success of his adventure.

The prime minister's daughter on awaking, and finding herself alone and bereft of her clothes and jewels, was

thunderstruck. With a loud shriek she fell into a swoon. Her parents hurried to her, and it did not take them long to see what had happened. On inquiry, they learnt from her the full details of the case, and the prime minister hastened to the court with the information. He received the sincerest sympathy at having been so mercilessly robbed, and the kotál was at once summoned, apprised of the affairs of the past night, and commanded to exercise great vigilance, so that similar cases might not occur in future.

The four friends were by no means cowards, and especially desired to make a prey of people prepared to oppose them. One of them, therefore, on the morning following the above incidents, called at the court in the disguise of an astrologer, and after the set form of speech peculiar to professors of astrology, said, "O Incarnation of justice! Four dangerous men have entered your majesty's kingdom with the intention of committing mischief. Last night one of them robbed His Excellency the Prime Minister. To-day again, one of them will try to make the chief merchant, Sadágar Mahásha, his victim. I reveal this secret so that your majesty may take means to thwart the wicked man's purpose."

The king dismissed the fictitious astrologer with rich presents, and called on the kotál to keep a special guard round the merchant's house. The whole city was awake, and sentinels paraded the streets, lanes and by-lanes. The prospective hero of the night, the merchant's son, whom we have referred to at the beginning of our story, was in the meantime making preparations to carry out his scheme of robbing the chief merchant in the city. Having ascertained that this man's old mother was a devoted worshipper of the god *Shiva*, to whom she had built a temple in the most unfrequented part of her son's extensive property, and whom she worshipped there every evening, he intended impersonating the god, and thus robbing her of everything valuable that she had amassed during her past life. A bull was secured, for the god was believed to ride only on an animal of this species, and

having saddled it, our hero, when the shades of evening were approaching, got on its back, he himself being wrapped in a tiger skin, and smeared all over the body with ashes, since this was *Shiva's* usual habit. Like the god, he carried a horn in his hand, and thus equipped, he proceeded to the temple through a jungly path, the *facsimile* of him whom he represented. He reached the temple while the merchant's mother was engaged in devotional exercises, and with *bôm, bôm, bôm*, the supposed watch-word of Shiva, he burst into the room riding the bull. The old lady looked up, and beside herself with joy on recognizing him whom she took to be her tutelary god, she made obeisance after obeisance, and when the prostrations were over, stood before him with folded palms. Her visitor played his part to perfection and said, "My daughter, I am very much pleased with you and your devotions. You are no longer to be left in this wicked world and so I come to take you to *Kailásh*, my abode." At the words, the Sadágar's mother was greatly moved. She shed tears of joy and gratitude, and expressed instant readiness to be taken into that celestial country. The wily actor, in order to extort everything valuable his victim had, thus broke forth, "Oh Mother, it does not become you to go to Kailásh without money or gems. Present them to your mother, Bhagabati, and your brethren Nandi and Bhringi, my faithful attendants."

The merchant's mother, hearing these words, asked permission to fetch all she had, and it being granted, she hastened to her room, emptied her well-filled coffers, and returned to the temple with immense treasure hid in a bundle of cloth. The false Shiva took her upon the bull, and drove it away till he reached the thickest part of the jungle, where he pushed her off the animal's back, and left her bruised and wounded. Getting into the public road, he drove the animal off to graze, and hurried on to where he lodged with his friends. His reception was as cordial as might have been expected, and the night was passed in great merriment.

Next morning the bed of the merchant's mother was found empty and no trace of her was to be discovered. The strictest search was made throughout the house, but to no effect. At length some of the merchants' neatherds, who had gone with their charges early to the adjacent jungle, found her half-dead with fright and exposure and brought her before her son. On being asked her experiences during the past night, she burst into bitter lamentations, and said, "O, how wretched am I! When I had nearly reached the doors of Kailáshpuri, I accidentally fell down. May God be merciful and take me there again, to enjoy that blissful abode in the society of mother Bhagabati and brothers Nandi and Bhringi." Being asked what she meant, she faithfully narrated what had happened and her son at once saw the hoax that had been played upon her, and hurried off to the court with the information. All were paralyzed with astonishment and they racked their brains to discover means to detect the perpetrators of these crimes, and prevent them from molesting others. At that moment, the preceding day's fictitious astrologer came in and prophesied that during the following night the kotál's house would be plundered, and he himself put to torture. The head of the police, however, was not the man to be frightened. He bragged of his sagacity and vigilance, and scouted the idea of being circumvented. But before the next morning dawned, he was destined to be taken completely unawares and robbed of every valuable article he possessed.

Evening drew near, and nature was quickly clothed in her sable garb. The kotál's son, who was to play his part, dressed himself as the princess of the kingdom, imitated her voice and manners, taking his friends with him disguised as her attendants, and carrying with him all the things required for worship. The plan adopted was that the kotál's son, the chief actor that night, should in his female dress impersonate the princess, and his companions her followers. All four bent their steps towards the temple of *Káli* near the palace.

Their female attire afforded them security and no policeman dared challenge them. But when they arrived at the spot where the kotál of the kingdom was personally superintending his forces, he, filled with suspicion, laid his hand on the shoulder of him who played the part of the princess. The latter at once assumed the dignity and tone of an affronted lady, and threatened to report the kotál's insolence to the king. The officer, under the impression that the person speaking was no other than the princess herself, fell on his knees and begged for pardon, which was granted on condition that he would amuse them by showing them how criminals were put in the stocks. The kotál, hastening to comply with their request, led them into the jail, and having none undergoing the punishment at the time, took off his coat, laid himself flat on his back, and asked one of them to put him into the stocks. It was no sooner done, than the hero of the night dressed himself in the uniform of the man at his mercy, went to his wife and so cleverly impersonated her husband, that he induced her to make over every valuable gem and jewel she possessed, to be kept securely by him until the morning. Then the young men, with their precious spoil, hurriedly left the place for their own house.

The next morning the kotál was missing, and the whole court and the members of his family, who were full of anxiety, looked for him everywhere without success. At length an inferior police officer happened by chance to enter the jail, and great was his consternation on finding the kotál stretched at full length on the ground, with the stocks on his feet. Being instantly liberated, the prefect of police saw his wife, who with tears related how the most precious things in the house had been taken away. The man was pierced to the heart to realize that he was now reduced to poverty, and hastened to the court with the report of the outrage done to him. Some pitied him, others less favourably disposed, laughed in their sleeves at his expense. A little later the pretender to astrological knowledge made his appearance as

usual, and announced that the king himself would be the next victim.

The sensation that prevailed after this announcement can be better imagined than described, and the whole city was in great consternation. The police force was augmented by recruits from the mofussil, mercenaries from all over the kingdom within a day's march were enrolled, and every house in the city sent out its volunteers. The king, at sunset, fully accoutred, patrolled the streets on horseback, and it seemed as if every door was shut against intruders.

Galloping far and near, the king on one of his rides towards the outskirts of the city, found a Jogi absorbed in his meditations, with a fire burning before him. The king was inspired with veneration for the Jogi's sanctity and bowed low to him, informing him of his troubles, and begging him to frustrate the evil purposes of his enemies. The Jogi expressed great sympathy, and offered to go to the palace, and cast a spell round it, so as to make it impervious to any attack. The king said that that was out of the question, for he had left word that nobody should be permitted to approach the palace. At that the Jogi appeared to give up the project, but the king, after musing within himself, came to a decision on the matter.

He said that the religious man might put on the royal dress, and riding on the royal horse, might reach the palace unopposed. The plan seemed feasible, but another difficulty stood in the way. The Jogi said that the fire burning before him was sacrificial, and that it was necessary that it should be preserved. The king, however, volunteered to attend to it, and the two men thereupon exchanged clothes. The king then sat down by the fire to replenish it while the ascetic rode to the palace.

The Jogi was no other than the prince of the foreign kingdom, bent on practising his ruse, and on he sped, until entering the palace, he hastened to the queen and talked to her so cleverly that no suspicion as to his identity entered

her mind. He pretended a great deal of apprehension, and induced her to deliver into his hands all the most precious gems and jewels in her custody. This done, he rode away, though not to the place where he had left the king, but to his lodgings.

The poor king waited for the Jogi's return for many hours, and when he could no longer command his patience, he wearily walked to the gate of the palace. On attempting to get in, however, he was repulsed by the police. On his becoming imperious they laughed at him, and then thrashed him so that he lay insensible during the remaining hours of the night. But when the sun rose above the horizon, some of the sentinels recognized him, and with aching hearts removed him to his bed, where it took him some considerable time to recover.

Later in the day he attended the court, and with tears narrated his experiences of the past night. The false astrologer was present; but this time the courtiers suspected him. They rightly thought that he must be an accomplice of the robbers; and one of them went so far as to throw out inuendoes regarding his complicity, and to advise his instant dismissal from the court, after he had been severely chastised. The object of this treatment, without making any protest, went away, and when he met his friends, they concocted a plan for the punishment of the courtier. What that plan was, we shall see later.

The court rose, and people went to their own homes in no enviable humour. They were all filled with suspense. Nobody knew who was to be the next victim. The security offered by the presence of the police was no security at all, and most of the citizens thought of leaving their homes for some other country. Human succour could no longer be relied upon, and appeal was made to the gods for the removal of the curse. The king resigned himself to the hands of fate, and after attending the special devotional services that were held, sought his bed.

Let us now divert our attention to the four men who had caused him and his people so much trouble. With a basket of sweetmeats, they knocked at the gate of the courtier who had that morning insulted one of them. The owner of the house, unwilling to receive strangers at so late an hour, did not open the gate, but asked from inside who his visitors were. To this they replied that they were bearers of presents from the king. The poor man's gullibility got the better of his judgment and half opening the gate, he thrust forth his right hand to receive the gift. But, alas, that hand would never more be used, for the greater part of it was chopped off, and the courtier rolled on the ground in great agony. His assailants vanished before his shrieks could be heard by his people, and hurriedly proceeded towards that side of the palace where the king's bed-room stood. Through its open window, they thrust the courtier's hand, tied to a pole, so that it touched the king's head. The king, instantly jumping up, cut at it with the sword lying beside him, and exulted greatly at the idea of having dismembered one of those who had so long been his pests and having thus found a clue to the discovery of the whole gang.

The next morning the king got up and instructed the kotál to send his men round to find out a man whose right hand had been cut off. But the man had not far to go for the unfortunate courtier was found coming to the palace, with his mutilated wrist hidden in a bandage slung round his neck. This at once aroused suspicion in their minds, and taking off the bandage they saw that the hand was missing and at once jumped to the conclusion that the man they wanted was before them. They led him bound to the king, and the account he gave of the night's adventure not being believed, he was sentenced to be tortured until he named his accomplices, and finally, if he did not confess, to be executed. The work of torture was about to commence, when the four young men, the cause of his misfortune, came to the court, dressed according to their rank, and made a clean breast of everything.

They had brought with them all their spoils, and they laid them at the king's feet with many apologies for the trouble they had caused. The king, too generous and humorous not to understand their motives, embraced them, and sent them away with many presents, giving the hand of his daughter to the prince. The kotál and the merchant also had marriageable daughters, and these they gave to the two young men whose fathers in their own country were of the same rank as themselves. The prime minister had a young maiden niece whom he married to him who had once impersonated his son-in-law. A veil was drawn over the past, and the four friends with their wives returned safely to their own country, not forgetting to make ample amends to the confectioner and the boatman for the deception they had practised upon them.

VII

KATMANUSH, OR THE HUMAN BEING WHO WAS MADE OF WOOD

AT a fair held on the borders of two contiguous kingdoms, there assembled a large crowd, but amongst all those who gathered there, two especially attracted the chief attention; the prince of one of the kingdoms, and the princess of the other. They were complete strangers to one another and happening both to fancy the same exquisite article which was for sale, they began bargaining for it. Taking advantage of the competition, the seller raised its price, till at last the prince thought it to be too high, and left the article for the princess to buy. But he was galled at the disappointment and beckoning the princess aside, he whispered into her ear, "If I ever possess you as my wife, I shall leave you, even on the day of our marriage." The princess also in a whisper made the reply, "If what you suppose takes place, I shall make you eat *jhole-bhát*[1] for six months." By this threat, she meant that she would make him lie prostrate on a sick-bed for six months.

The two then parted, though neither of them forgot the episode. In the course of a few months, the prince's father, thinking of marrying his son, sent *Ghataks*[2] to the neighbouring kingdoms, and the princess's father happened at the same time to do the same with regard to his daughter. The Ghataks of both countries met, and patched up a contract of marriage between the prince and the princess, to be in time confirmed by their fathers. The contract was ratified, and

[1] Boiled rice and thin broth. [2] Match makers.

the required preliminaries having been gone through, the marriage day was fixed. The two young persons most interested in the affair remained in ignorance of the fact that there was soon to be the very relationship between themselves that they had, but a few months ago, imagined and made vows concerning. Great therefore was their astonishment when they met before the priest, to be united in the bonds of matrimony.

The ceremony duly came to an end and the prince and the princess were about to be conducted into the bridal chamber, when the former, alleging some urgent duty as a plea, left the palace never to retrace his steps. The bride therefore was compelled to pass the night without her husband. She understood full well what his absence meant but instead of regretting her former impertinence, she rather bragged of it to herself, and renewed her own vow a thousand times.

Months passed without the husband or wife hearing of each other. Their parents kept a good understanding between themselves but the chief parties remained indifferent. One morning, a woman, apparently made of wood, but possessed of the power of moving, speaking, and acting like a human being, came to the prince's mother, and asked service of her. The whole house was in amazement at this prodigy. But the voice and words of sense coming from the abnormal form so captivated the queen that she could not refuse the services offered. The woman gave her name as *Kátmánúsh*,[1] and closed the contract, saying that there were two conditions that must be made; one, that she should never be told to cook, and the other, that she must be permitted to sleep alone in her own room. Being promised these things, she worked as an ordinary servant.

Time passed, and Kátmánúsh endeared herself to every one in her mistress's family. The prince talked kindly to her and the king bestowed especial favour on her. One evening

[1] A human being made of wood.

there was a fair held near the palace and its inmates went there, leaving her behind. She being alone and thus free to act as she liked, emerged from her wooden frame, which as the reader may by this time have guessed, had been assumed by her as a disguise, and went to the roof of the palace to take the evening air, not suspecting that any one would intrude. But she was wrong in her calculations, for the prince returning to the house on some urgent business, knocked at the gate. She hastily resumed her wooden frame and opened the door to him, whereupon he at once asked who the lady of unrivalled beauty on the roof was. She said she was ignorant of any lady being in the house, and though the prince remained silent, the vivid impression made upon him by the extra-ordinary manifestation of beauty his eyes had seen could not be effaced from his mind. There was hardly a moment when he did not think of her who had captivated his heart, and he greatly longed to see her again. But his longing was vain, for the time being at least, and he gradually pined away. Great mental anguish produced bodily distempers, and the healthy and vigorous young man was turned into a skeleton. He lost his appetite and the power of digestion and was forced to take to his bed. Nobody knew the cause of his complaint except Kátmánúsh, who kept the secret from them all. At length all hope of the prince's life was given up and a message was sent to his sister, living in her father-in-law's house, that she must visit her brother at once, if she wished to see him alive.

What sister can remain away from the bed-side of a brother in such a plight? The princess without a moment's delay started for her father's palace. But the journey was too long to be accomplished in one day, so she was compelled to halt by the way to spend the night. Near the inn where she stopped, there was a temple of Shiva, and she fell prostrate before the god to supplicate him for the recovery of her brother. Thereupon the god revealed to her, that the prince was certain to get well if she who was named Kátmánúsh

would cook his food for six months, and sleep in the same room with him for the same time.

Delighted with this communication, she sped to her brother's side, and informed her mother of the instructions of Shiva. Kátmánúsh was then called in, and piteously asked to save the prince's life. She raised many objections, the chief among them being that she would not, as she had stipulated at the beginning of her service, cook or sleep with any living mortal. At this the queen and the princess became very importunate. They fell at her feet, and with tears rolling down their cheeks entreated her to preserve from an untimely death him whom they loved more than their lives. She at length gave in on the condition that when cooking, she must be left alone with the doors shut and that when she slept with the prince, there must be no light in the room. We need hardly say that the conditions were gladly accepted, and from that very day Kátmánúsh began ministering to the prince.

Six months expired in this way, and during the first night after the termination of that period, Kátmánûsh as usual lay by the side of the prince in total darkness. She could not sleep owing to the different feelings that agitated her. Love struggled with pride, and pity with feminine bashfulness, until at last, casting aside the wooden cover that hid her charms, she lit the lamp in the room, awakened the prince and stood before him endowed with all those charms that had from the house-top turned his head. He gazed at her, and dim recollections of the past crept into his mind, until at last convinced that the lady before him was no other than his wife, he hugged her to his bosom.

Next morning, the whole royal family were surprised to find the door of the prince's room shut, even when the sun gilded the domes of the palace. That Kátmánúsh should be so late in quitting the room was a mystery to them, and the queen herself, afraid that some mishap might have happened to her son, called at last from outside, until the sleepers awakened and opened the door to her. We can easily realize

how thunderstruck she was to see a lady of ravishing beauty in the place of the servant of abnormal shape, and her son with the flush of health and cheerfulness on his countenance. Explanations were given, and the queen, setting fire to the frame of wood with her own hands, led the prince and princess to the king. The whole city soon became a scene of joy. All the houses in it were grandly decorated, and during the night there were magnificent illuminations and fireworks. The happy couple viewed the scene from a splendid chariot driven from one end of the city to the other, the people in crowds shouting, "Long live the prince and the princess Kátmánúsh!"

VIII

THE WILY BRAHMIN

THERE was once a certain Brahmin and his wife who although they were in quite good circumstances were very miserly. It was rumoured that they had amassed a considerable sum of money in cash, and that the gold mohurs and rupees in their chest were covered with rust. Some thieves, hearing of this, one night approached their house, and from behind the sleeping-room began consulting as to the best means by which they could get inside. They supposed the Brahmin and his better half to be asleep, and so were not too careful to talk only in whispers. But their intended victims were awake, and the Brahmin determined not only to thwart them, but to utilize their labours for his own benefit. So in an audible and distinct voice, he said to his wife, " O Brahmini, I fear thieves will to-night break into our house. But what can they find? All our wealth is safely buried in the field just behind the house."

The thieves on hearing this, naturally gave up the idea of housebreaking, and all in a body, their number being about a score, left the place and, having secured hoes and spades, returned to the field, and dug it from one end to the other. But to their surprise they found nothing worth having. The Brahmin, however, reaped great benefit from their labour. It was the proper season of the year to have the field dug and prepared for the cultivation of rice, and he thus got the digging done by the thieves without spending a single cowrie for the purpose.

Disappointed, though not dispirited, the thieves made their appearance the next night behind the Brahmin's window, intending to break through it. He was expecting them, however, and hearing the sounds of their footsteps when they came to the spot, he addressed his wife, saying, "You see how I have baulked the thieves. I suspected their approach, and therefore to hoax them I spoke of having buried my treasures in the field, while in reality I have kept them at the bottom of the tank beside it."

The thieves, hearing the words, at once went off and secured very capacious vessels to empty the tank, and set to the work in right earnest. The tank soon looked liked a dry pit, while all its water had run over the field, fertilizing the soil for the purpose of agriculture and thus saving the Brahmin considerable expense.

The Brahmin, fearing that the thieves having been baulked twice, would muster in greater force than before and make a more determined and desperate effort, left home the next evening to secure the services of some hirelings to make a strong resistance against attack. A thick darkness covered the fields as he anxiously sped on his errand. In the middle of one of the fields he saw six stalwart men seated in a circle round a fire at which they were warming themselves. He drew towards them, for he too was feeling cold, and to make room for himself said to one of them, "*Saratobhái tápái.*"[1] Now the beings he saw were not men but ghosts, but they also, being of flesh and blood, feel cold as well as men, and require to warm their limbs, and the one addressed, whose name was Tapai, was startled to hear, as he imagined, a human being calling him by name. In a nasal tone, peculiar to ghosts alone, he exclaimed "Brahmin! how did you know my name, and come to address me so familiarly?" The Brahmin was petrified with awe at hearing the voice, for it took him no time to realize that he was in the midst of a company of ghosts. But he summoned up his courage and

[1] Move a little, brother, I will warm myself.

said, "Friend, though you seem not to know me, I know you well." At this another ghost, to try him, asked him if he knew his name, and the Brahmin replied, "*Hilláh re bhái Hilláh*,[1] don't I know your name?" This too hit the mark, for the ghost's name was Hillah, and the word the Brahmin had uttered as an interjection, sufficed to save him from much trouble and perhaps even from death. The ghosts at once took him as their friend, and asked him the motive that brought him to them. He told them how a band of ruffians was in league against him, and how great was his need of helpers, and they in a body accompained him to his house for the purpose of assisting him.

It was near upon midnight when they reached the house, and the Brahmin, giving his friends some supper, asked them to wait unseen for the thieves. Taking unsubstantial forms, they remained hid in the hollow of a Cháltá tree in the yard. They had not long to wait, for those whom they expected soon made their appearance. This night their plan of attack was different. Having given up the idea of house-breaking, they determined to make an open attack, and scaling the walls and jumping down into the yard, they intended bursting open the main door of the building. But again they heard the Brahmin and his wife talking, and apprehensive that when still awake they might give the alarm to their neighbours, they resolved to tarry for a while. There was in the yard a *taktaposh*,[2] and they sat down on it for a little rest, intending to make their attack when the immates of the house should fall asleep. But while they were thus awaiting the proper moment, tired Nature pressed her claims upon them, and the hard labour that they had undergone during the past two nights, which had allowed them not a wink of sleep, caused them to feel very drowsy, and at length they fell soundly asleep on the bed.

The Brahmin opened the door of his room as silently as possible, approached on tiptoe the Cháltá tree, and asked his

[1] Hallo! brother.

[2] A wooden bed.

ghostly friends to break off a number of the fruit, tie half a dozen of them to the long hair of each thief, and then give chase to them. His friends did as directed, and the thieves on being awakened ran out of the house as fast as they could, hearing shouts of "mar-salader"[1] uttered by the ghosts, and receiving blows from the Cháltá fruit that kept hitting them on their backs as they ran. These they took to be stones and brick-bats thrown at them and they made good their escape half dead with fright.

Never again did they think of molesting the Brahmin, whom they now knew to be too full of resource for them to get him into their power. They disappeared from the quarter in which he lived, and the resourceful Brahmin's very name became a terror to evil-doers.

[1] "Thrash the salas."

IX

HATI SING, OR THE VANQUISHER OF AN ELEPHANT

THERE once lived a very poor family, consisting only of a mother and her son. The latter was worthless, and unable to earn a pice for the maintenance of his mother or himself. The poor woman had to submit to the greatest drudgery, in spite of which they could hardly get sufficient food to keep them alive. One day, in the bitterness of her heart, she cast reproaches at her son, Dulal, for the useless way in which he passed his life. The young man felt the reproaches deeply, and knowing full well that it was beyond his power to improve, he formed the resolution of committing suicide.

Poisoning seemed to him the best method of carrying out his resolution. But whence could he get the poison? To buy any was out of the question, for that would require money, of which he had none. His inventive mind, however, soon devised a way. He went to a place which he knew to be frequented by cobras, and finding one of them, hit it on the tail with a stick and placed a plantain leaf before it. The infuriated reptile, with its hood erect, bit the leaf, and deposited its poison on it. Dulal was delighted with his success, and begging a little *múrhi*[1] from a neighbouring shop, to mix with the poison in order to take off its hot and pungent taste, he went to the bank of the river Ganges to end his life there. A bath in the river is supposed by Hindus to be the surest passport into heaven, and Dulal, an orthodox

[1] Fried rice.

Hindu, entertaining this belief, walked into the water, leaving the *múrhi* mixed with poison on the steps of the ghat. He intended to eat the *múrhi* and pass out of life after the purifying bath. But Bidhátápúrush [1] ordained otherwise, for as soon as he dipped his head into the water the king's elephant, which had been brought there for a drink, saw the *múrhi* lying before him, and ate it up. The cobra poison entered its system, and acted so quickly that in a moment the elephant began to give up its life. Dulal, getting out of the river and coming to the spot where he left the *múrhi*, at once realized that the elephant had deprived him of the means of committing suicide, and in his rage he gave the offender a slap. Now although the slap would have been of no consequence whatever if it had been given to a healthy elephant, when it fell on an animal already tottering on its legs on account of the poison, it had the effect of knocking the enormous beast over. The slap and the fall happening at the same moment, the people on the river side supposed the former to have caused the latter, and gazed at Dulal with wonder and fear. They regarded him as a Hercules and the report of the feat soon spread far and wide, until it reached the king, and produced a mixed feeling of grief and joy ; grief for the elephant's death, and joy at the prospect of securing the services of a man able, by a slap, to kill such an animal, and thus by his strength defy the enemies of the Crown.

Dulal was at once brought before the king in a *chatúrdola*, and the king was surprised to see in the killer of the elephant a skeleton, with blue rings round his eyes, the signs of intemperance and weakness. But he remembered that external appearances are often deceptive and he employed Dulal as his Jamadar, or Head Durwan, on a monthly salary of two hundred rupees. By way of distinction, the name of Hati Sing was given him, and he passed his days lazily but happily with his mother, whom he had in the first dawn of his palmy days taken to live with him. He became the favourite of the

[1] The Supreme Being.

king, who soon found him a wife in one of the most beautiful girls in the kingdom.

Hati Sing's fame rang far and wide throughout the country. One day a band of Kábúlis sought the king's presence, and urged him to fix a wrestling match between them and Hati Sing. On the day appointed for the competition, the Kábúlis appeared before the king, but Hati Sing, knowing that for him to stand before them as an opponent was as foolish as for a blade of grass to rear its head against a hurricane, put off the catastrophe by saying that it was beneath him, as a Hindu, to touch or to be touched by them. But the Kábúlis would not let him escape thus. They urged him to try his strength with them in some other way, and the king told them that he would think over the matter, and let them know his decision on the morrow.

But they were not to see the next day's light. Hati Sing, by means of money and influence, bribed the keeper of the inn in which they slept during the night to hide a venomous snake under their beds. The poor men retired to sleep and their sleep ended in death, caused by the fangs of the destructive reptile. So no more had Hati Sing to fear them. Left undisputed master of the field, he went on practising his deception and amassing wealth, till at length, after the lapse of some years, death carried him off under circumstances that disabused the king and his subjects of the confidence they had so long placed in him. A fruit-seller came to the palace-gate with the choicest mangoes for sale. Hati Sing's mouth watered at the sight of them and he demanded some mangoes as a bribe for the man's admission into the royal presence. But the man would not part with any of his mangoes without receiving their price, and so an altercation took place between him and Hati Sing, in the course of which the latter said, "You fool, you do not know who it is who asks you for a few mangoes. It is the redoubtable Jamadar, Hati Sing." To this the fruit-seller, who had heard neither the name nor the fame of the person bearing it, replied, "I have seen many

a Hati Sing in my time, but if you touch one of my mangoes I will soon see that you are a dead man." This was an insult which our hero, to maintain his prestige among the others at the gate, could not pass over, and with a kick he upset the basket of mangoes. But no sooner was this done, than a severe blow from the muscular right arm of the fruit-seller laid him prostrate on the ground. In a few minutes the whole palace, including the king himself, came to the place of occurrence, and what was their wonder to find their champion Hati Sing on the point of death from a single blow given by an ordinary man. Comments were made by every tongue, while Hati Sing, knowing that his end was near, and that there was no need for further deception, faithfully narrated his own history, and then gave up the ghost. It was a sad and shameful death, but deceit seldom fails to meet its own deserts in the end.

X

THE COUNTRY OF SWINDLERS

THERE was a certain Sadágar[1] who on his death-bed said to his son, "My son, I am in a short time to leave the world. The riches I have gained will enable you to sit with one leg over the other and eat. There will be no need for you to visit foreign countries. If you take a fancy, however, to do so, I adjure you never to think of going to the country in the far east known as the 'Country of Swindlers.'"

Several years followed the merchant's death, and his son, stepping into his shoes, maintained the credit of the family. But it was impossible for the young man to fight against the decrees of fate. A good many of his speculations failed, and there was a considerable strain upon his purse, so that, to retrieve his fortune by foreign trade, he fitted out four ships laden with merchandise, and bade farewell to his country, at least for a time.

At first the voyage was prosperous, but one day the sea through which the ships were passing became unusually rough. Waves rose mountains high while the sky became so overcast that it was almost pitch dark. The crew, even experienced as they were, lost their way, and called on the gods for help. For three days the elements remained furious without intermission, and the ships were sent adrift. At length, however, it cleared up, and the merchant and his men found themselves near the shore of a country which, though unknown to the former, was well known to the latter. It was

[1] Merchant.

the "Country of Swindlers," and on learning the name from his men, the young merchant trembled with great fear. It was the very country of which his father had warned him, and now he was compelled to land on it, for to divert the course of the ships was impossible.

Resigning himself to the hands of fate, he ordered the vessels to be driven to the nearest port. This was being done when the merchant, seeing a snow-white heron, was led by his evil genius to shoot it dead. No sooner did this happen than a fuller, who was washing clothes near by, ran to the spot and fell to the ground, beating his breast and tearing his hair. He took up the dead heron, kissed it a hundred times, and then furiously abused the merchant for having killed his father, who as a heron had been helping him in washing clothes. The merchant, as was natural, laughed at the idea, and the washerman hastened to the king and filed a petition for damages. The alleged offender was hauled before the court, and on his failing to defend himself—for what defence could be made in such a preposterous case?—the king, who was a partner in his subject's exactions, decreed that one of the ships with her merchandise should be given as satisfaction to the wronged washerman.

The merchant, much crest-fallen, went back to his ships, and had the mortification of witnessing the execution of the decree. He hoped, however, that with the remaining three he would be able to escape from this accursed country. But of them also he was destined to be deprived in a very short time. As soon as he was on board, a woman with two urchins, having cunningly succeeded in getting his father's name from one of his men, drew near and said, "O my son, do you not know what I am to you? I am your stepmother, the widow of your father" (here she gave the latter's name) "left penniless by him. Make an ample provision for me and these my children." The merchant, of course, scoffed at so absurd a claim, and thrust the woman out of his presence. But the matter did not end there. Like the washerman, the woman

ran to the king and, the unfortunate merchant being unable to disprove her words, the king decreed to her another of his ships with the merchandise and crew.

Two ships only remained, and the merchant made preparations for instant departure, but when the sails were about to be unfurled, a barber made his appearance in search of customers. The merchant having had no shave for months, called him in, and offered him an anna for his labour. But the barber would not consent, whereupon the merchant said that he would pay what the barber should deem sufficient. The bargain being struck, the barber did his work. When, however, his customer offered a rupee as recompense, he knit his brow and refused to take so small a sum, saying that he did not think it enough and that he thought that a ship with all that it contained was his adequate reward. The merchant had him driven out, and the barber, hurrying away to the court, in the absence of the merchant got the third of the ships decreed as his due recompense.

The ships of the merchant were thus reduced to one, and this one was set hastily in motion. But just at that moment a man blind of one eye came up to him, and said that at one time he had pawned an eye of his to the merchant's father for a thousand rupees, and that he was now ready with the money to redeem his eye. Saying this, the blind rogue counted down the exact sum, and demanded the instant delivery of what he had pledged. The merchant could not but think that another trick was being played upon him, and that by another royal decree he would soon have to part with his last and only ship. Nevertheless he could not refrain from kicking out the rascal, who at once went to the king, and applied for what he called justice. The result of the proceedings was just the same as in the other cases brought against the merchant, and the poor man, deprived of all his ships, merchandise, and men, was left alone in this strange land of merciless swindlers. In the circumstances there was nothing left for him to do but to set out on foot along the seashore, hoping that he might

eventually reach some other country. But he had not long to remain in this pitiable situation. After he had gone a few miles, he met a company of robbers armed to the teeth and under a leader of remarkably stalwart appearance, though bearing the signs of age. The merchant's handsome appearance, seen even under the gloom of despondency that had overcast him, attracted the leader's attention and awoke in him some painful recollection that had long remained dormant in his mind. It was that of his son, no longer in the land of the living, to whom he thought the young man before him bore an exact likeness. He therefore approached the merchant, and hearing his story, at once volunteered to rescue him from his helpless position, and took him to the king to compel the latter to hear what the merchant had to say to repel the charges brought against him, and to revise the unjust judgments pronounced against him. The presence of this imposing leader at the head of his men considerably cowed the king, for he by experience knew that they were too formidable to be trifled with.

The king then assembled his court and called upon the merchant to state his case, upon which the latter, according to the instructions of his friend, the robber chief, spoke thus, "O Incarnation of Justice, with your Majesty's permission, I beg to answer the charges on which my ships, merchandise, and men have been taken away from me, and made over to those who plotted against me. May I be heard with impartiality, in the event of which I shall have back everything I have lost. Now as to the first charge brought by the washerman, I beg to say that even if I killed his father in the heron, I did so under great provocation. I started on my voyage with my dead father, who had assumed the form of a *dánkoná*[1] to show me the way, and when I reached the tree on which the heron was perched, the bird made a swoop on my father, the *dánkoná*, and made an end of him. Let the washerman, the owner of the first aggressor, give me back my father and then I will do the same with regard to his father."

[1] A very small fish.

The robbers gave loud applause in approval of the argument and the king dismissed the washerman's case, ordering the ship taken by him to be restored to the merchant with its cargo and crew. The washerman was at once summoned and forced to obey the order.

The second charge, that brought by a woman, was then taken up by the merchant, and again instructed by the robber chief he spoke, "Mighty king, I admit that the woman who claimed to be provided for by me is actually my stepmother; and I am prepared to take her and her children with me to my own country, and there to pay them, as the dearest and nearest of my relations, the attentions they are worthy of. Graciously order their presence, that I may take them home."

"Hear, hear, hear," resounded from the lips of the robbers, and the woman was summoned before the court, and ordered with her children to follow her alleged stepson. She, however, hung down her head in confusion, and finally rejected the merchant's proposals. The king, too, looked confused and grieved at the prospect of losing his lion's share of the spoil made through her, but through fear of the robbers he was forced to restore to the merchant all that he had been robbed of in consequence of the woman's charge against him.

Having cleared himself so far, the merchant, with the king's permission, left the court, in company with his friends, the robbers. With the assistance of these he found the barber's house. The man was called out, and the robbers belaboured him so well that he fell down at their feet and cried for mercy. Thereupon the merchant said, "Well, cheat of a barber, you have robbed me on the ground that I did not give you enough. Now receive enough from me, and sign an acknowledgment to that effect." Saying this, he rubbed some nettles on the barber's body, and the stinging pain was so great that the swindler cried out, "*Bus, bus.*"[1] Instantly paper, pen, and ink were produced, and the barber was only

[1] Enough, enough.

too glad to escape by writing down these very words, with his signature below.

The merchant with his friends then returned to the court, handed over the paper to the king as an acknowledgment of the barber's satisfaction, and the king restored to the merchant the ship he had lost on the cheat's complaint.

There remained thus only one ship to be recovered, and one of the robbers, leaving the court, went in search of the one-eyed rascal. The search was successful, and the rogue was brought before the king, whereupon our hero thus pressed his suit, "O Impersonation of justice! the man before you had one of my ships with my possessions in it decreed to him by this august court on the ground that I was unwilling to give him back the eye he had pawned to my father, even on receiving the money advanced on it. Now, sire, I beg with all humility to say that I was not in the least unwilling to let him have his property on the receipt of my money but only unprepared to do so because I had not the eye then with me. I was just going to explain this to him, when he grew mad with fury and sought your majesty's presence. Now I admit his claim, and I will return him the eye as soon as I can find it, on my return home, among the many eyes that were pawned to my father, and are carefully preserved in our family treasury. All that I want is a little time, and the other eye of this man, for without it, it will be impossible for me to find its fellow. Order it then to be plucked out, and made over to me, and for the faithful performance of my promise, I will leave with him that ship of mine which is already in his possession."

The speech being ended, the claimant of the eye looked glum and vacant and finally ran out of the court, hooted and pelted with stones by the gang of robbers. The court then ordered the merchant to take possession of his fourth ship. This was soon done, and he who had been the victim of so many chicaneries left the wicked country, awarding one of his ships to the head robber in grateful acknowledgment of his matchless and disinterested services.

XI

THE MAN WHO WAS ENRICHED BY ACCIDENT

THERE once lived a Brahmin and his wife, who were very poor, wanting even the bare necessaries of life. The husband was a great dolt, and his wife possessed as little sense as he. One day she spoke to her husband thus, "O lord of my life! I have heard that our king is very fond of poetry, and that he rewards every Brahmin who approaches him with a clever *sloka*.[1] Why don't you see him with one of your own compositions?"

The Brahmin replied, "Darling, am I fit to approach the court in my dirty clothes, and this dirty *poitá*?"[2] The Brahmini thereupon washed a suit of clothes for him and prepared a new *poitá* also, and the next day her husband started for the king's presence, though the *sloka* was not yet ready. He thought that he would compose it on the way, and thus went along ruminating. He racked his brains, composed some lines, and then finding them not to his satisfaction, rejected them altogether. A thousand attempts like this were made, but nothing came of them. When he was hesitating whether he should proceed forward or return, he accidently saw something that supplied him, as he thought, with the materials for a good *sloka*. What he saw was a bull rubbing its hoofs on a stone moistened by the water of a fountain, and he at once uttered the two following nonsensical lines:

"*Khúr gharsan, khúr gharsan chikir chikir páni*
Tomár moner kathá ámi sab jàni."

[1] Verse.

[2] The sacred thread round a Brahmin's neck.

Great was his joy at what he considered to be the inspiration of *Saraswati*,[1] and with a bold heart he made his appearance in court, thus addressing the king, "O blessed of the goddess *Saraswati*, I have a *sloka* for your hearing, and I crave permission to repeat it." Permission being granted, the two lines were repeated. The whole court burst into laughter, even the gravest there failing to maintain his gravity. But the king, with greater control over his feelings, soon put a check to this risibility, and with seeming approval dismissed the Brahmin with a handsome sum of money, not as a reward for his poetic genius, but as a gift in consideration of his poverty.

Inflated with pride at his achievement, the Brahmin went home, and finding his wife waiting for him in anxious expectation, lavished a thousand caresses on her as his good angel. They then passed the day in conversation as to the best way in which the money in their hands should be utilized, and the next morning the Brahmin went to the bazaar and returned with the necessary articles of consumption.

A few days after the Brahmin's visit to the king, affairs in the court took a very unpleasant turn. The heir-apparent, in conjunction with his friends, formed a plan to kill the king. None of the conspirators, however, could call up sufficient courage to do the monstrous act openly. Some suggested that the king should be quietly assassinated at night when passing into the *zenana*, others that he should be removed by poison. But neither of these plans was deemed sufficiently practical, for on his way into the inner apartments the king had always a guard with him, while the food that he took was always tested beforehand by a chemical examiner. At length it was proposed by the prince that the family barber should be bribed to commit the murder while shaving his Majesty; for in that case the act would be considered an accident, and no suspicion would fall on any one.

Next day the barber was called in, and after a good deal of

[1] The goddess of learning.

opposition, he succumbed to the temptation in consideration of the immense sum put into his hands as earnest money, and when next it was his duty to shave the king, he approached his royal master determined to carry out the wicked plan.

A human life was going to be terminated by a swift stroke inflicted by the razor, and so it was necessary to sharpen it with peculiar attention. The barber, on standing in front of the king, put a few drops of water to his razor and began rubbing it against the hone, as barbers invariably do before shaving. The act reminded the king of the Brahmin's *sloka*, and he said, "You see, barber, that what the Brahmin said the other day may be fitly said by me also on the present occasion. By *khúr* he meant hoof, but it means razor as well. So now there is *Khúr gharsan, khúr gharsan* with *chikir chikir páni*. I know all the intention with which it is being done, so the other line, *Tomár moner kathá ámi sab jàni*, may be added as well."

The barber was beside himself with fear at what he heard. He thought that the Brahmin's *sloka* was an invention of the king's, and that he had used these words to intimate that he knew his thoughts at the moment. The poor man, who was not naturally dead to better feelings but had been gained over by a very large sum of money, quaked in every limb, and ultimately regaining the power of speech, implored his master's pardon in piteous terms. The king was thunderstruck at what he saw and heard, and at length asked the barber the reason of his being thus moved. Thereupon the man, with tears rolling down his cheeks, made a clean breast of everything, and the conspiracy being thus found out, all the persons concerned in it were adequately punished.

The Brahmin, whose *sloka* had thus accidently been the cause of saving the king's life, was invited to the court, and granted a jagir for himself and his heirs to enjoy for ever.

XII

STRANGE FRIENDS IN TIME OF NEED

THERE was once an old woman, a widow, in very straitened circumstances. She maintained herself by husking rice for other people, and getting particles of *khúd*[1] as reward. But poor as she was, she was not free from being molested by a thief. Frequently he visited her house and purloined the commonest things he could get, until at length the poor woman determined to seek the protection of the king of her country. With this purpose she was on her way to the palace, when a lump of clay, seeing her approach, said, "Where are you off to, old woman?" She replied that she was going to the king to ask for a guard to protect her from a certain thief. The lump of clay said, "Take me to your house, and leave me at the threshold. I will be your guard."

The woman did as she was told, but she once again set out towards the palace, not fully depending on the assurances of the lump of clay. On the road she found an open razor. It asked her the same question as the mass of clay had done, and, according to the instructions of the razor, the woman placed it close to her first sentinel, in the passage leading into her room. Still, however, doubting the efficiency of her two self-constituted guards, she again resumed her journey. A third time she found a friend on the way, a *shingi* fish, noted for the sharp appendages below its head, and it advised her to put it on the steps leading into her room, in a *hándi*[2] full of water. When she was returning home with this new recruit, she met a bomb and a frog, and desiring to add these to the number of her protectors, she carried them also to her house, and according to their instructions, placed the

[1] Ground rice. [2] Earthenware pot.

bomb by the side of her oven, in which the fire had not yet been extinguished, and the frog beside her bed.

All her fears now vanished, and with a sense of security she ate her sorry meal, sought her bed and fell asleep. The thief, not knowing the preparations against him, made an attempt to enter the woman's house, and trod on the lump of clay at the threshold. Not knowing what it might be that he had trodden on, he hastened to wipe it off on a patch of grass close by; and immediately the sharp razor inflicted a deep incision on his foot. The wound bled severely, and beside himself with pain, the thief hurried to the *hándi* near by, and plunged his foot into the water it contained. The *shingi* fish was at once on the alert, and pierced the wound with the spikes below its head, causing the wound to throb so painfully that the thief, to relieve it, placed his foot near the oven to warm it at the fire. This caused the bomb to roll into the fire and burst with a loud explosion. Several parts of the thief's body were badly burnt, and the thief in great pain ran from one end of the room to the other. The report awoke the woman, and she heard the frog saying, "*O burhi otna chorer náchan dákhna.*"[1]

The thief was obliged to lie down for hours, quite helpless. The old woman, being of a kindly disposition, carefully tended his wound, thus heaping coals of fire on his head. So much was he affected by this that henceforth he became an honest man, and out of his small earnings fed and clothed the old woman till the end of her life. A report of this strange occurrence at her house was in time carried to the ears of the king, and not only did he bestow a pension upon her, but he also rewarded her helpers in the fittest way possible. The lump of clay had a shrub of roses planted on it, the razor every morning was used to shave the royal chin, the fish and the frog sported in a cistern in the palace, and, as the bomb had suffered martyrdom in the old woman's service, its remains were enshrined with honour.

[1] Get up, old woman, and see the thief's dance.

XIII

LAKSHMI'S GIFT

IN a certain village in Bengal there lived a poor Brahmin widow and her son, without any ostensible means of subsistence. The young Brahmin was only a boy, and not old enough to obtain work. Fasting became habitual to both mother and son, begging being a profession that fails in course of time. One day, the Brahmini, no longer able to bear the pangs of hunger and the sight of her son's sad face, left home to drown herself in an adjacent river. When she had gone about half the distance, a dog asleep on the side of the road rose up at the sound of her steps, and shook a *cowrie* from its head in front of her. Out of curiosity, she took it up and proceeded on her sad journey. But she was not destined to put an end to her life, for a fierce tiger suddenly appeared in front of her, and frightened her so that she stepped backwards. He could, if he had liked, have made a meal of her, but he did not seem intent on so doing. He acted rather as a father frightening away his child from running into danger, and the more the Brahmini moved backwards towards her house, the closer was she followed by her new friend, until she quite forgot her intention of drowning herself and reached her own home again, trembling in every limb.

The tiger was indeed her friend, for he was no other than *Nandi*,[1] whom *Annapurna*[2] had borrowed of her husband, and sent to befriend the poor woman by first saving her life,

[1] Shiva's favourite.
[2] The goddess who provides men with food.

and then supplying her and her son with food enough for the day. The tiger's mission then took him to the bazaar, whence he got all the necessary articles of consumption, and, lest his entrance into the Brahmini's house should throw her again into terror, he considerately cast them over the wall into the courtyard.

As it was late in the day, neither the Brahmini nor her son ate any substantial food before sunset. They waited for the evening to set in, and then an excellent meal was prepared such as they had never before had. They ate heartily, and after conversing on the momentous topics of the day, they sought their beds. The mother, when about to lie down, found the shell of the cowrie tied in one corner of her *sarhi*, and after showing it to her son, and telling him how she had obtained it, placed it under her pillow. Sleep then seized their eyelids, and the night passed in sweet oblivion of their troubles.

Next morning, the Brahmini, on leaving her bed and removing the pillow, found the cowrie changed into a *mánik*.[1] Surprised and delighted, she took it up, and going to the richest jeweller in the city close to her house, pawned the gem for one-tenth of its value, and returned home with all possible speed. She communicated the good news to her son, who fell into an ecstasy on seeing the immense sum of money heaped on the floor. They could now afford to fare sumptuously, and after breakfast they commenced talking of their changed condition and prospects, when suddenly an old woman approached them and told them they were wanted by an old Brahmin living a little way from their house, and that it would be to their advantage if they went to see him. The mother and her son followed the woman, and were taken into a very rich mansion, grandly furnished, and with many servants in attendance. The mother was introduced to the old Brahmin, who showed her all the apartments, and told

[1] A mánik is a fabulous gem of immense value supposed to lie in the head of a snake. It is reputed to be worth the wealth of seven kings put together.

her that the house with everything in it was her property. She looked amazed and confounded, and was about to break forth into exclamations of joy and gratitude, when the old Brahmin, and the woman who called on her, suddenly became invisible. On the place where they had stood were two pillars of light, and two distinct voices were heard one after the other. The first was the voice of the woman, speaking thus, "My daughter, unable to bear the sight of your woes, I, *Lakshmi*, sent one of my servants in the shape of a dog with the cowrie, which was in reality a mánik, and as the money you got on pawning it must be securely kept, I have with my husband, *Nárdyan*, had this place built for you by *Vishvakarma*, our architect. Live here with your son, in wealth, luxury and peace. All I ask of you in return is to worship me yourself and persuade others to do so too."

Náráyan said, "You, good woman, are the favourite of my wife. I shall ever remain with you, though invisible. Remove your wealth here and with the money which you will find now in the east room redeem the mánik, and keep it always with you."

The god and goddess having taken their departure, the Brahmini did as she had been told by Náráyan. What a contrast there was between her present and her former position! She who but the day before was a famished beggar was now the mistress of a place filled with treasure and servants waiting to do her bidding. After the lapse of a few years, she secured a wife for her son, not from among princesses or daughters of the rich, since these high-born ladies, she thought, would be too haughty and overbearing to suit her. She selected her daughter-in-law from amongst the middle classes, and the choice for a time seemed wise and the marriage promised to prove a happy one.

The girl's head, however, was soon turned by the wealth in the house. She became very luxurious and prodigal, and her mother-in-law at last was forced to protest against her extravagance, saying, "*O Bouma*,[1] do not act like this, for my

[1] Daughter-in-law.

house and everything I possess have been obtained from a cowrie." On being spoken to in these strange terms, she asked her husband what his mother's remark meant, and he frankly acknowledged that his mother's having obtained the cowrie from a dog had been the foundation of their fortune. The wretched daughter-in-law, to turn the tables upon her mother-in-law, when the latter asked her again next morning to be more considerate, replied, "Ah, *Thakrun*,[1] I know at what cost you have got all these fine possessions. Your wealth is the result of your friendship with a dog."

Cut to the heart and thunderstruck, the mother-in-law sought her room, and knowing that the revelation had been made by her son, and resolving to remain no longer with him or his wife, she instantly left home in disgust, leaving everything behind her, including the mánik. She walked on at random, passing city after city, town after town, village after village, until at mid-day, under the scorching rays of the summer sun, she reached the foot of a banyan tree, which afforded a refreshing shelter to wayfarers. For some time she sat under the shadow of it, but by the time she was ready to resume her journey, she had become very thirsty. Her throat seemed parched, and to slake her thirst she approached a neighbouring rill. To her amazement, just as she took a little water in her hands and raised it to her lips, the mánik she had left behind dropped down from between her clasped palms and a voice came from overhead saying, "Daughter, I will not leave you at any time. Go to the nearest king rich enough to buy the gem, and spend the proceeds on good works."

As the words ceased the Brahmini saw rising from the ground a mansion as large and magnificent as the one she had left, with numerous servants waiting to minister to her wants. A rich repast was ready prepared, but she could not fully enjoy it, owing to the heaviness of her mind caused

[1] An epithet applied to all women as a term of respect, especially to one's mother-in-law.

by the thought of her separation from her son. The next day she sold the mánik, as Náráyan had directed, for the Being who had spoken to her was no other than the god himself. She then proceeded to worship Lakshmi. Afterwards, she devoted herself to works of charity. She built innumerable houses near her own mansion, and had them filled with suitable people invited from every quarter. The king became her friend, and on his suggestion she did numberless acts of public usefulness, such as the establishment of schools, hospitals, houses for the poor, great marts for trade, and other things of the same kind. The excavation of large tanks was one of her favourite projects, to carry out which she had to employ a great army of labourers, whom she paid daily in cowries.

Leaving her to use her wealth in this laudable manner, let us for a moment direct the reader's attention to what was going on in the house she had left. For some time after his mother's departure, her son, with his wife, lived as comfortably as before. But their happiness was of short duration. The house soon began to look gloomy and deserted, their money seemed to evaporate, and the servants, one by one, left the house. Finally a gang of incendiaries set fire to it one night, and plundered it wholesale. On the following morning the Brahmini's son, having no means of subsistence, took his wife to his father-in-law's and left her there while he went in search of work. But what work could he do? Ignorant of letters, he could aspire to no work except manual labour and that of the meanest kind. But even here the stars seemed to be against him, for everywhere he applied, he was rudely driven away. At length, emaciated and in great misery, he chanced on the place where his mother lived, and hired himself as a day labourer, not knowing in whose service he was employed.

The mother who had expected the ruin of her son, and like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, anxiously looked forward to his return to her, used every morning personally to watch strangers who sought service at the tanks from one of the

windows of the palace, and one morning she was delighted to see that her son was among the applicants. She at once called in the overseer, and ordered him to keep an eye on all the newcomers, not letting him know that her son was among them. The work went on as usual, until it was time for the workers to bathe and eat. Meals and also dwelling huts were prepared at the cost of the estate, and when the young Brahmin was going to the hut pointed out to him as his own, his mother sent a maidservant to lead him into the inner apartments of the mansion. The order was obeyed, and the man being brought in, a servant was ordered to wash the stranger's feet, anoint his body, supply him with a bath, and dress him in new clothes. This procedure produced great terror in the object of these attentions. He had heard it said that if sufficient water did not soon come up when a tank was being dug, human sacrifices were sometimes offered to *Barún*.[1] His mind was thus filled with apprehension that he was intended as the victim for sacrifice. To crown his uneasiness he was led before the mistress of the mansion and made to sit down before a sumptuous meal, which he imagined must be the immediate precursor of his death. He could hardly take a mouthful without watering it with his tears; until at last his mother, no longer able to witness her son's distress, ran up to him and, making herself known to him, embraced him with great joy. The son clasped his mother's feet, and begged her pardon, which, however, had already been tacitly granted. The Brahmini then enquired after her daughter-in-law, and learning that she was living with her father in wretched circumstances, she sent for her. She came, a changed woman indeed, and always afterwards remained submissive. Thus the favourite of Lakshmi passed her days in uninterrupted happiness, till it was time for her to be taken into the joys of *Baikuntha dhám*, the heavenly abode of Lakshmi and Náráyan.

[1] The god of water.

XIV

THE REDEEMING POWER OF THE GANGES

THE Ganges is believed by Hindus to be a manifestation of Bhagabati, who came down to earth in the form of a river for the sole purpose of redeeming men from their sins, so that the mere touch of her waters buys forgiveness for even the foulest of crimes. Bhabaghuray records two illustrations of this, which we give here.

There was once a Brahmin, named Lochan,[1] who was a ship's sircar, or supplier of orders to foreign ships lying in the Ganges. On one occasion he had to go on board a vessel which was on the point of starting for England, for the purpose of receiving his dues. It took some time for the accounts to be squared and settled, and when the Brahmin was counting the columns of rupees, annas, and pies, the ship, unknown to him, unfurled its sails and began to proceed on its journey. By the time the transaction between the Captain and Lochan came to an end, she was off Saugur Island. When the Brahmin, to his great discomfiture, perceived this, he implored the Captain to land him. The Captain at first represented to him the dangers to which he might be exposed in being cast ashore alone in the jungle just when night was falling, but he was at length persuaded by Lochan's importunities to accede to his wishes. A jolly-boat was lowered, and Lochan was landed on the shore many miles away from the haunts of his fellow creatures.

As night was rapidly approaching, the Brahmin walked

[1] The eye.

away from the seashore in search of shelter. But there was none to be found. On he trudged, amidst the howls of tigers, the grunts of wild boars, and the hissing of snakes, that frequent the Sunderans, until he reached a beautiful stretch of grass surrounded on all sides by palmyra trees. Finding the place not so desolate and gloomy as the rest of the jungle, he sat down in one corner of it, giving up the hope of finding a better protection for the night. His wearied limbs found rest, and at last he fell into a doze, from which he was roused by the noise of sweeping brooms. On opening his eyes, he found a number of sweepers brushing the grass lawn. These were followed by *Bhistis*, busy with their work of laying the dust. Behind them came others, who after spreading a very large piece of gaudy carpet, put a number of bolsters on it, and completed their work by placing all round it beautiful white candles that burned brightly against the approaching darkness, with a throne at one end of the carpet. The preparations being complete, there marched on to the lawn a procession of richly dressed beings who were apparently human, and he who led the procession walked up to the throne and sat down upon it, while the others took their seats at a respectful distance, the bolsters supporting only those of highest rank.

One dressed like a Magistrate's *Peshkar*[1] then approached the occupier of the throne, and read the contents of a scroll of paper, the meaning of which was quite unintelligible to Lochan, although he sat close to the throne itself. Some discussion followed, which ended with certain orders being given by the chief. At length, business done, the chief ordered tobacco to be prepared for him to smoke, and a gold hubble-bubble was immediately placed before him. He at once began smoking, and the delicious smell of the tobacco filled the air. Lochan was a confirmed smoker, and as he had not had a smoke for many hours, greatly desired to have a pull at the *kalkay* even if the pipe should not be given him.

[1] A Peshkar is a court officer, who lays before a Judge or Magistrate the cases to be decided on a particular day, and gives him the purport of the plaints.

He resisted the temptation for some time, but when quite unable to do so any longer, he crept up to the feet of the chief, and most piteously begged him for the *kalkay*. The chief looked at him, and to his surprise recognizing him at once, said, "Ah! what is it, Lochan?" Lochan, growing bolder, looked up at his questioner, and said, "Can it be *Pishemohashoy*?"[1] The two men thus recognizing each other, the smoking pipe was handed over to Lochan, who, in obedience to etiquette that no one should smoke in the presence of one superior to himself, drew aside behind a palmyra tree and smoked to his heart's content.

Lochan then returned to his uncle's side and they began to converse.

"Well, Lochan," said Pishemohashoy, "what has brought you here? And how are you getting on? Have you got any family? I have neither seen nor heard of you for a long time. And there is good reason for it."

Lochan in reply informed his uncle how he had come there, and gave him all the particulars asked. He then asked his uncle why he was on the solitary seashore at that dark hour, apparently presiding over a court of justice. Lochan asked also why Pishemohashoy had for some years ceased all communication with his devoted nephew. To this the uncle replied, "Baba Lochan, hear my history from the time I left you, down to the present. You know that I was with the British army under Clive, and worked in the Commissariat, though it pleased me greatly to be present on the battlefield as often as I could. I was an interested spectator at the battle of Plassey, and just when Meer Jaffer with his men was about to leave the ranks of the Nawab for those of the English, a Mohamedan soldier on horseback rode up to the place where I was standing, and severed my head from my body. My body lay on the battlefield unnoticed and soon became food for dogs and jackals. My skull, however, remained intact, till a *Jogi* took it to his hut in the forest, and made a cup out

[1] The worshipful husband of my father's sister.

of it. During the day it remains unused, but at night the ascetic fills it with Ganga water for his ablutions. An accidental death has turned me into an evil spirit, and during the day I have to live in the torments of hell, but during the night I enjoy the bliss of heaven, for then my skull contains the holy water. What you have seen is my nightly court, where, empowered by Yama, I administer Justice to those departed spirits who have been wronged by their fellow spirits. Now, my dear Lochan, do one thing for me and I will make you the master of immense wealth. Visit the ascetic's abode, and somehow or other take my skull thence and throw it into the Ganges. Then this supremacy that you now see me enjoying will be perpetual, and I shall never lose the joys of heaven."

Lochan gladly agreed to his uncle's request, and was that very night borne by two spirits in human shape to the hut of the ascetic. Here Lochan carried out his uncle's orders and was thence taken to the cave of a mountain near Madras. The cave was filled with gold mohurs, and very costly gems, which the spirits placed in baskets, and lifted up in their hands. They then told Lochan to shut his eyes, and in a trice he was carried to his home in the Burdwan District. There he and his family lived as happily as possible, his chief delight being to send out bands of men chanting mother Ganga's praises.

The scene of the second incident illustrating the saving and sanctifying power of the river Ganges is said to have happened in the recesses of a forest in southern Bengal, the chief actors being certain evil spirits of dead women, known as *Shankchoornis*. The narrator of the incident says that on a day of pilgrimage to *Ganga Sagar*[1] a man was wending his way along the outskirts of a particular forest, when his ears caught sounds of rejoicing in the distance. There were shouts, huzzas, the sounds of conch-shells, and the far resounding cries of women. The traveller passed by, and reached the

[1] The place where the Ganges meets the Bay of Bengal.

place of pilgrimage. The next day, however, when returning by the side of the same forest, he heard coming from the same spot cries of weeping and lamentation. In order to see who the people in that solitary place could be, and what might be the cause of this change in their lot within so short a time, he walked into the forest, and saw a number of women rolling on the ground in agony. Among them was a girl, who gave vent to her grief in greater abandonment than all the rest. The traveller waited for a short time, and when the first paroxysm of grief had passed he approached and asked the meaning of what he saw.

One of the mourners in a nasal tone, the tone peculiar to ghosts, said, "O Mahashoy, hear our misfortune. That girl lying there in mute despondency is our cousin, and we expected her to have been married to a youth who a few hours since has been gored to death by a bull. As a death of this kind makes men ghosts,[1] we thought this handsome youth would be our cousin's husband, and we sent a friend to entice him into our midst. When you passed this way yesterday, we were rejoicing in anticipation of the wedding. We waited and waited till midnight for the bridegroom, but neither he nor our friend turned up. At length the friend whom we had sent returned, and from him we have heard that the intended bridegroom has not become a ghost, but a spirit in heaven. So all our rejoicings have turned into lamentations of intense grief. We asked our messenger the cause of his delay and he said that he had waited long to see if he could not get possession of the dead man's person. The issue depended on a struggle between the messengers of *Shiva* and *Yama*. The messengers of the former wanted to take the man to *Kailash*, while those of the latter desired to thrust him into the society of ghosts. At length Shiva's angels were victorious, and they carried the young man to the peaceful abode of their master, and consequently our messenger had to come away disappointed."

[1] Death by accident is supposed to bring suffering in the next world, and to cause the dead to frequent the earth as ghosts.

The traveller was amazed and asked the *Shankchoorni* if she had heard from her friend the cause which had led to the frustration of their hopes. She replied, "The man himself felt certain of becoming a ghost, if nothing intervened to alter his fate, for an accidental death implies damnation. There was one circumstance, however, in the case which turned the scale in the young man's favour; and that was that the bull which gored him had a little mud of the Ganges sticking to his horns, and the touch of this mud opened the young man's way to Kailash."

The traveller left the scene in great wonder, and devoted his life to the worship of the Ganges. He organized a band of his village-men to sing the praises of the river everywhere in lower Bengal, and Ganga Sagar became the revered spot of their annual pilgrimage.

PART II

I

MADHUMALA, THE WREATH OF SWEETNESS

THERE was once a king who had vast possessions. Everything that the world could give was his, save one thing only. He was childless, and the fact that he had no son was taken as a sign of the displeasure of the gods. So in spite of his rank and prestige, he was looked down upon as an *antkoorha*.[1]

One day, at dawn, the sweeper was at work in the palace in the very apartment next to that in which the king slept. The latter, roused by the noise, came out of his room and saw the sweeper, who, to avoid seeing a childless man's face at the beginning of a new day, covered his eyes[2] with his hands. The king observed this, and was astonished to find that he was an object of aversion even to a sweeper. From that time he became very sad and morose, and a smile was seldom seen on his face. Heaven, however, at last took pity on him. One day *Bidhátápúrush*,[3] disguised as a religious mendicant, with a bright lamp of gold in his hand, visited him, and speaking words of consolation said, "O king, do not despair. Bright days are yet to come. Take this lamp, and with it go to that tank of yours which is called the tank of life. You

[1] A childless man.

[2] Hindus of the old school believe that to see the face of one who is in any way unfortunate at the commencement of a new day augurs evil.

[3] A Hindu god believed to predestine at a man's birth everything that will happen to him in life. The events are said to be faithfully written on his forehead, on the sixth night after the child's birth.

will find there a tree of silver with fruit of gold. Two of these golden fruits you must bring down with an arrow, with your eyes towards the ground, and your breath suspended." The king, overjoyed at this revelation, did as ordered, with the exception that he forgot, when shooting the arrow, to hold his breath. This omission spoilt everything. The fruit did not fall from the tree, and the king fell senseless on the ground. Bidhátápúrush, the mendicant, who was standing by, revived him, and said, "O king, rise up and with eyes shut, stretch forth your palms, and a bird of gold will descend on one of them. Take the bird home and throwing away its wings and claws, have seven different kinds of curry made of it. Eat some of each of the seven and you will have a son godlike in appearance and endowed with many accomplishments. But under the earth you must build a mansion of stone, and here the queen, having passed the days of her confinement, must remain with the prince and his nurse for twelve years, secluded from the world."

The king carried out the instructions to the letter. The bird was eaten, the mansion of stone built, and the queen removed there to await the birth of the long-desired son. In due time the son was born, and named Madankumar, the Cupid-like youth. Rapidly he grew up both in mind and body. He had nearly completed the twelve years of seclusion prescribed when one day he expressed a desire to see the world outside; the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the other wonderful phenomena of nature of which he had read and heard from his nurse. His mother, remembering Bidhátápúrush's injunctions, refused compliance, but the boy's persistence at last prevailed. The consent of his father, however, had to be obtained, for there were still three days wanting for the completion of the twelve years. The father, unwilling to refuse his son's request, yet doubtful of the consequences, called and consulted a conclave of astrologers and other men of lore. They finally decided that the short period of only three days was not worth considering, and

accordingly the queen and her son were brought with great state to the palace. Thus for the sake of three days was Bidhátápúrush's command violated.

Madankumar was very fond of sports, and one day when quite a young man he asked his father to let him join in a hunting expedition. Reluctant as his parents were, the importunity of the youth carried the day, and he set out with a large number of attendants, the prime minister's son being the chief among them. This young man was especially commissioned by the king to look after his son. For the whole day the chase continued without success, and Madan being loth to go home empty-handed proposed to have tents pitched in the woods and pass the night there. Tired out with the chase, he was soon asleep. Now it happened that about midnight two *parees*,[1] Kala Paree and Nidra Paree by name, who were flying to visit the dancing hall of Indra the king of the Hindu gods, looked down and saw Madan as he lay asleep in his tent and, entranced with his handsome person, they halted in their flight.

"Sister," said Kala Paree, "look downwards. There is one tent there full of lustre. I see a thousand moons together, the brightest gems in the world gathered and heaped up there. Or it may be that one of the gods is reposing in the company of men."

"It is none of these," replied her sister, "it is Madan, the son of famous king Dandadhar."

"We must find a wife worthy of him," said Kala Paree. "Can you think of one?"

"Surely Madhumala alone is a fit bride for such a man," Nidra Paree declared.

"Then, sister" said Kala Paree, "let us take up the bed on which the prince lies, and carry him to his bride."

Nidra Paree did as her sister wished, and Madan's bed was in the twinkling of an eye carried to the regions beneath the sea and placed in Madhumala's room beside her couch.

[1] Fairies.

The parees then roused them from sleep, and standing aside in the shadow watched to see what would happen. Great was the amazement of the prince and the princess to be thus miraculously brought together, and shyly at first they began to converse, Madan giving an account of himself, and Madhumala informing him who she was. The conversation soon became of an intimate nature and with both it was a case of love at first sight. Both made promises of everlasting fidelity and exchanged rings as tokens of their plighted troth. But their enjoyment was of short duration: the parees cast an irresistible spell on them, and they fell fast asleep, leaving the match-makers free to dispose of them as they willed. During the small hours of the morning they removed the prince to his camp, not on his own couch, but on that of the princess. This expedient was resorted to in order to leave a tangible token of the happy meeting.

When the prince awoke in the morning the first words he uttered were, "O Madhumala, where art thou?" His companions were naturally astounded, and the prime minister's son, hearing from the prince of his adventures during the night, at once declared that it must have been nothing but a dream. The prince, however, replied, "Friend, you call my experience of the past night a dream, but could a man exchange his ring with another's in a dream? See also this couch. Is it the one on which I fell asleep last evening?" The argument, though convincing enough, had no force with the minister's son, who at once made arrangements for the breaking up of the encampment and the instant return of the party to the palace. The prince reluctantly consented, but the state of his mind was unchanged. After his return home he could speak of nothing but this adventure until at last his distracted parents feared that his mind was affected and that he was under a spell. In vain they tried to divert his mind from the subject. The young man persisted in his assertions, and ultimately implored them to allow him to set out in search of Madhumala, to whom he had plighted his troth in the dream.

KALA PAREE AND NIDRA PAREE

It came as a terrible blow to them to realize that their darling, who had never left their side, save for that one day's hunting, was about to leave them, it might be for ever. They attributed all this to the anger of the gods, which they had brought upon themselves by letting him leave the subterranean house three days earlier than they had been commanded, and falling on his neck they implored him with torrents of tears to give up the enterprise, which in their opinion was no better than a wild-goose chase. But nothing could divert him from his purpose; and the king, to make the best of a bad case, prepared for him a ship with a great company of followers. On an auspicious day he put the dust of his parents' feet upon his head, and started on the voyage to the seas, under which he believed his sweetheart dwelt.

Many days and nights, many months even, passed by without success attending the prince's quest, till at length, overtaken by a violent storm, they were all drowned save the prince, who after three days was washed by the waves on to the beach quite insensible. Some goat-herds found him and resuscitated him. Upon being asked who he was, and with what object he had set out upon the seas, the prince told them everything, not omitting to mention with particular emphasis the name Madhumala.

The mention of this name acted like a charm upon them, and with joy they cried out—"Ah, this is he for whom our king's daughter, Champakala, has been waiting; for, from books of astrology and the god *Shiva* to whom she daily prays to bring her husband to her, she has learnt that one who is out seeking for Madhumala's abode shall be her lord." Saying this, they took Madan to their king, who, aware of the revelation made to his daughter, at once introduced him to her. She asked her father to marry her to the youth, who was so obviously destined to be her husband; and the nuptials were celebrated that very day with great pomp. When the couple retired to the bridal chamber, Champakala told her husband that she knew of his longing

for Madhumala, and that though she herself was not aware of her whereabouts, the information could be obtained from a princess named Panchakala, dwelling far off in a region where seven rivers met. She then made the prince promise her that, on his successful return, he would take her to his father's kingdom and acknowledge her as his wife.

The next morning, Champakala according to her promise allowed her husband to depart. After a long and tedious journey of many days he reached the outskirts of the kingdom of Panchakala's father. There being met and detained by a sepoy of the king's, he said, "O brother, detain me not. I have to find out Madhumala, my beloved." The sepoy replied, "Now at last my duty is done. I have been posted here to lead to the king one who should in any way allude to Madhumala. You, sir, have uttered the name and must now follow me." Saying this, he had a *Chatturdola*[1] brought, and took the prince to the palace, where a scene similar to that which had transpired between him and Champakala took place, after which he was directed by his new wife to seek a princess named Chandrakala, who was Madhumala's intimate friend. Setting out on the following morning the prince again made a long journey, and after crossing rivers, seas, mountains, and forests, at length reached the kingdom of Chandrakala's father. There he met with a hearty welcome, for the king, apprised beforehand of his future son-in-law's arrival, had made preparations to receive him. Madan and Chandrakala were married that very day, and when the former told the latter the object he had in view, she said that Madhumala was her friend, and that she would put him in the way of finding her. She also advised him not to accept any other dowry from her father save the peacock on the steeple of the golden temple in his kingdom. The boon was asked and granted; and Madan, mounted on the peacock's back, started in search of Madhumala, promising Chandrakala

[1] A kind of palki carried on the shoulders.

that when he returned, he would take her to his father's kingdom with his other wives.

Let us now return to Madhumala, whom we left sleeping on Madan's couch. The next morming, her maids, as usual, came into her room, and finding it disordered, asked her the reason. She answered nothing in reply, merely exclaiming again and again, "O Prince Madan." At this they feared that she had lost her reason, and ran to the king and queen with the report. They instantly hurried to their daughter's chamber, with the best physicians available in the kingdom. They were all at a loss to conjecture what was the matter with the princess, and leaving her undisturbed, they withdrew to hold a consultation, which, however, ended in nothing. Day after day passed and the king in despair gave orders to put his capital in mourning. His own palace of gold he had demolished, saying it was no longer of use to him until his daughter got Prince Madan back. He sent a written message throughout the habitable world, to the effect that there was a bride named Madhumala, with a kingdom, awaiting the prince Madankumar, but the messengers returned without finding the prince. The king, no longer able to bear the sight of his daughter's sufferings, resolved to make away with his life. But happily good fortune dawned upon him at last. One night the sentinels on duty saw a brilliant light, as of innumerable torches high up in the air, and as they gazed at it a splendid looking youth astride a golden peacock alighted. It was thus that Madankumar came to find his beloved Madhumala.

On alighting, the prince saw that the palace was in a ruined condition, and attributing it to some terrible calamity feared for the safety of his love. His anguish was intolerable, and he broke forth into bitter lamentations, saying, "Tell me, O skies and seas, what has caused these ruins, and who has robbed me of my beloved, beautiful as the full moon. O ye gods, bring my life, my Madhumala, back to me." His voice was heard by her whose ears had waited so long for it,

and Madhumala, rushing forth from the chamber where she had for so many days imprisoned herself, caught her lover in her arms and taking him into the most secluded of her apartments kept its doors shut for seven days.

In the meantime, her parents learned from the sentinels what had happened; and on the seventh day, they came and knocked at the door of her room. No notice was at first taken of their summons, but on their repeatedly knocking and calling, Mudhumala from within asked her father if he could bear what he might see. On his replying, the door was opened, and the king and all the people with him exclaimed, "What is it that we see? Is it not the full moon by the side of the sun that rises at dawn? Or may it not be two gilded pictures placed side by side."

Next day, the king ordered the palace to be rebuilt, and it quickly attained its former splendour. An auspicious day was appointed for the marriage of Madan and Madhumala, and a letter was sent to King Dandadhur, the father of the former, inviting him to be present at the wedding. The letter was like precious balm to his and his wife's long-afflicted hearts, and with great rejoicings they set out for the kingdom under the ground. Their voyage was prosperous, and they arrived in time to witness the marriage, which was celebrated with unusual splendour. For thirteen days and nights, dainties were freely distributed to all the guests, whose number was unlimited, and a rich dowry consisting of a kingdom of seventy scores of Pergunnas, and of heaps of gems and gold mohurs, was given to Madankumar.

A few days after this, King Dandadhur expressed the wish that his son, daughter-in-law, and attendants might be permitted to leave for home; and preparations were at once made for their journey. Madan and Madhumala were to go on the peacock's back, while the others would sail in ships; and on a day pronounced by astrologers as favourable the whole party left the kingdom, after the exchange of the most cordial farewells. King Dandadhur after a safe voyage

reached his kingdom, with all his attendants. But his son, though on the peacock's back, was late by a few days. He had had to delay some time on the way to visit his other wives, and arrange to take them along with him. At length he reached his father's dominions in safety, and entered the palace amidst joyous acclamations, grand illuminations, and fireworks, the family guru,[1] the priest, and all those women fortunate enough to have their husbands living,[2] chanting hymns of thanksgiving and praise.

[1] Spiritual instructor.
[2] Hindu widows are prohibited from taking part in any joyous proceedings.

II

PUSHPAMALA, THE WREATH OF FLOWERS

IN a certain country, the king and the prefect of police were both childless; and they bewailed it as a great misfortune. One day an astrologer came to the wife of each, and pointing out one of the seven tanks near the palace, told them that they would have the long-desired son and heir were they to bathe in it. The next day they went to the tank; the queen by the steps on one side, and the prefect's wife by those on the other. When they had dipped their heads in the water, the former called to the latter, and proposed that in anticipation of the fulfilment of their expectations, they should enter into a pledge. To this the prefect's wife replied, that people like her did not understand what a pledge was, and that therefore she could not enter into one. At this the queen explained to her what a pledge meant, and said that the one she would propose was that their children, if of different sexes, should be married to each other; but if of the same sex, they should be knit by eternal frendship.

A scene of a similar nature was at that very moment being enacted elsewhere. The king and the prefect with innumerable body-guards were hunting in a forest. They had been on the look-out for game for hours, without success, and the king put the blame on the prefect of police, because he being an *antkoorha*,[1] his very presence was unpropitious. The prefect was a great flatterer; so instead of turning the tables on the king, as he could with perfect justice have done, he agreed to submit to any punishment that might be inflicted. The

[1] Childless man.

flattery succeeded and the king kindly called him away from the others for a chat. The conversation was opened by the king, who said that during the previous night he had dreamed that a son was born to him, and another to the *kotál*.[1] To this, the latter, with a thousand apologies and with folded hands, begged permission to say that he had had a different dream, that a daughter was born to him, his master being blessed with a son. Contradiction was unbearable to the autocrat; and in a rage he ordered his companion to break off a leaf from the banyan tree standing by, and bring it to him, so that he might put down in writing what he had to say concerning the matter under discussion between them. The leaf was brought, and the king wrote on it: "If, kotál, you have a son, and I a daughter, I will marry them to each other; but if the reverse happens, I will have you beheaded. Again, if each of us gets a male child, I will give half my kingdom to your son." Of course the kotál could not but accept the conditions.

In due time the queen and the kotál's wife gave birth, the former to a girl of unusual beauty, and the latter to a male child. Time helped the growth of each, and the two children were, when five years old, sent to the same pathshala.[2] Pushpamala, the king's daughter, sat on the throne, while the kotál's son sat below. In their studies they made rapid progress, especially in reading and writing, in which they showed great proficiency. One day the pen in the hand of the princess accidently dropped to the ground, and the kotál's son eagerly picked it up and gave it back to its owner. The same thing happened seven days in succession. But when on the eighth day the pen of the princess again fell to the ground, the kotál's hopeful did not take it up, and on being asked the reason, said that he would never more serve Pushpamala in any way, unless she exchanged garlands with him. The princess was thunderstruck, and when the pathshala broke up, she returned home in an angry frame of mind.

[1] Prefect. [2] School.

The incident of the pen took place when the princess and the kotál's son were each about fifteen years of age, and instead of estranging the heart of the one from the other, it produced such feelings in both of them as seemed vague and indefinable to themselves, but which may safely be said to have been the first germs of love.

Next day, the pen that the kotál's son was using slipped from his hand, and the ink from it was spilt on the princess's face and clothes. A tremor seized the former; and he was hesitatingly beginning an apology, when the latter picked up the pen and made it over to him. The boy, for reasons best known to himself, went home before the usual hour of dismissal, leaving his bundle of books behind, but taking away the pen. The pathshala broke up at the appointed time, but Pushpamala lagged behind. It struck twelve, yet she had not arrived home, and her mother grew anxious. The princess at length reached home in a strange humour, and in spite of the importunities of her mother, did not even touch the food before her, but retired into her room. The kotál's son too was in an unhappy frame of mind. Having reached home he moved about restlessly, unable to fix his mind on anything that had formerly interested him. Fate at last directed his wandering steps into his father's bedroom. Lying down on the bed he fell into a reverie which was suddenly broken in upon by the banyan leaf, on which the king had drawn up and signed the contract between him and the young man's father with regard to their unborn children, falling upon him. Taking up the leaf, and reading what was written on it, the kotál's son learned that he had the right to demand the princess's hand. Rushing into the king's presence, with a sword in his hand and the leaf in his pocket, he begged for the fulfilment of the royal promise. The king was at first thrown into confusion; but in the twinkling of an eye, he collected himself, and ordered the young kotál to be driven out. The young man, much mortified, left the palace and walking at random, reached one of the seven tanks near by,

into which in disgust he threw the sword and the banyan leaf. He then directed his steps homewards.

Just about the same time Pushpamala, persuaded by her mother, came down to bathe, and fate led her to the same tank. On finding the leaf floating, she took it up, and read what was written on it, and so intense were her feelings that she swooned away. One of the maids attending on her ran into the palace with the intelligence, and the king and the queen hastened to the spot. Restoratives were administered with success, and the princess was taken home. She remained silent and sullen, however, for the rest of the day, and spent a sleepless night.

Next morning, both she and the kotál's son went to the pathshala and took their respective places. The tutor, finding something unusual in their demeanour, asked them to explain it, at which Pushpamala showed him the leaf, and both of them asked his advice. He said that as the contract it contained had been entered into by their fathers, and as their mothers had also bound themselves by a promise, they must fulfil it. At this the princess left her throne to her lover, and sat on the floor at his feet ; and though there were no lessons that day, they remained there till the usual hour of dismissal, when each of them, making valuable presents to the guru, went home with the mutual understanding that they would leave the country together during the ensuing night. It was arranged therefore that the kotál's son should wait at the foot of a particular tree, whence he was to give the signal of his presence by playing on a flute. The night came, and the princess was subject to such feelings as generally work in the mind of one going to take so serious a step as that of leaving her parents and her home, with all its dear associations. Her heart palpitated and her whole body trembled. The last duty she thought of performing for her parents and the other inmates of the palace was to cook the best dishes for them, and to serve them with her own hands ; and her mother, unable to divine her motive, attributed her self-denial to a

childish freak, and permitted her to act in her own way. She had finished cooking and serving the meal, when she heard her lover's flute, as if saying:—

"O princess! how long wilt thou be sleeping? It is midnight, hasten or the morning star will rise, and our plans be foiled."

But as yet she could not go out, for the sentinels were still awake. It was midnight, and the flute was heard again:—

"Ye stars and trees, witness that I am waiting for my sweetheart, and that she is delaying. Oh that she may not forget her promise!"

Then at the beginning of the fourth watch of the night, when the flute sounded once more, Pushpamala changed her clothes, tied her jewels in a bundle, and whispered to herself, "Stay, stay, my friend, stay a little while for this unfortunate maiden. In the first watch of the night I cooked the night-meal; in the second I served it out; during the third the guards were awake; and now the fourth has come and I step out to meet thee. Little canst thou conceive my feelings on leaving my parents! They will weep themselves blind at my absence; and just as the cow lows for her young calf, so will their souls cry after me."

Then the longed-for meeting took place, but the lovers did not at once proceed on their journey. The kotál's son, seeing that the dawn was not far off, induced the princess to take him into the royal armoury and stables, where he selected two good swords and two winged horses for himself and his betrothed. Then, disguised as two soldiers, they started with the speed of an arrow, and on the fourth day, in the evening, reached a grand mansion, which was the habitation of a *dacoit*[1] king, his old mother, and six brothers. The brothers were out on a plundering expedition, leaving their mother at home. She saw the two riders approaching the gate, and instantly accosted them, saying, "My children, my people are out, and I am here alone. Make yourselves, however, quite at home." After that she placed before them some oil to be rubbed on their bodies in

[1] Robber.

preparation for the evening bath; and when they seemed somewhat refreshed, offered them food. But the girl said that as they never ate anything not prepared by their own hands, they would cook themselves. At this the dacoit's mother, who had seen the valuables on the persons and horses of her guests, and from these had guessed that they were worth robbing, gave them such materials for cooking as would detain them longest, so that her sons might in the meantime come home, and do with them as they pleased. She gave them such fuel as would take long to ignite, and such rice and *dal*[1] as would not soon boil. Pushpamela commenced cooking under these disadvantages, and her face and eyes were swollen at the smoke from the oven. She was very ill at ease; and her lover, who had gone for a bath in the tank near the house, was in a similar plight. The old woman had thrown water on the stairs on four different sides of the tank, to make them very slippery, and he could ascend them only after several falls and bruises. He smelt danger, and from outside the house gave the alarm to Pushpamala, saying that she must look sharp, and see that the horses were not removed. He then came in and helped her to finish cooking as soon as possible; and both of them having gone through a hurried meal, got on their horses and galloped off. But the woman they left behind was too clever to be baulked. In order to enable her sons to track the fugitives, she managed to tie to the horses' hind legs very small, hardly perceptible bags of cloth filled with mustard seeds, and perforated in order to allow the escape of the seeds. The lovers did not notice the trick; and so they rode on unaware of the danger, leaving the old woman in a frenzy at the delay of her sons. She waited a long time and then she had recourse to the plan, previously arranged between her and her sons, of making a bonfire in an emergency as a signal to them to come home. Accordingly she set fire to a stack of straw lying by, which quickly burnt into a red blaze, and instantly brought the dacoits home. Not letting them dismount, she seized hold of

[1] Pulse.

the reins of their horses, and turned the heads of the animals towards the road taken by her guests, telling her sons in the meantime of the mustard seeds that they would surely find on the way. They took the road pointed out to them and, overtaking the fugitives, made a fierce attack upon them, but such was the princess's dexterity in using the sword, that she cut off the heads of six of them. The remaining dacoit, the youngest of the brothers, with a dried bit of straw which he found lying on the way between his teeth, implored her to spare his life, on condition that he would ever remain her slave in return. The kotál's son recommended the bestowal of this favour, saying that it could not do any harm. But the princess said, " My dear, remember that the sages have said that to leave unpaid the least portion of a debt, not to extinguish the last spark of a fire, to spare an inveterate enemy even when he is at his last gasp, are as foolish as for a person to approach blindfolded a yawning abyss. Do not tell me to spare the fellow." Her lover, in spite of the warning, persisted in his recommendation, saying that even granting that the robber's penitence was all pretence, he singly could not injure them when they were two together, and Pushpamala at last relented. They then rode forward with the robber as their groom, and finding a large piece of open ground with a beautiful tank, and an attractive orchard, the kotál's son suggested that they should take a bath, and satisfy the cravings of hunger by eating some fruit. The princess yielded, though unwillingly, and they both got down into the tank, leaving their horses and swords on the bank in charge of the groom. This ruffian, taking advantage of their temporary inattention, took up one of the swords and cut off at one stroke the head of Pushpamala's lover. The murderer, having by some means seen through her disguise, cast in her teeth the fate of him for whom she had left all, and asked her to be his. The girl, knowing her danger, controlled her grief, and pretended to be glad at the request. The robber then took his seat on the horse of the deceased and invited her to do the same. But she said it did not look well for her to be on the

horse that her new lover rode, and that therefore she would ride her own horse, with her own sword in her hand, to resist any unforeseen attack. The fellow, too foolish to see through the pretence, agreed to the arrangement, and by the time he had gone a few yards, his head fell dissevered from his body. No longer in fear, the princess had time to think of her irreparable loss, and wept and cried, rolling on the ground with her lover's head held close to her breast. But she had not to weep long, for he was restored to her by *Parbati*.[1] How it happened may be gathered from the following dialogue between the goddess *Shiva* and her husband.

"My lord," said Parbati, "I hear a woman crying. Who may it be?"

"Nobody cries save one in grief," replied Shiva: "but what is that to us? While passing on our way, you notice everything. Come, let us pass by."

"No, my lord," urged Parbati. "It is not for me to pass by when one of my daughters is in trouble. She may be a wife bewailing the loss of her husband, or a mother that of her child. My heart bleeds to leave her without consolation!"

Saying this, the goddess willed herself to be taken to the spot whence the sound of crying came; and this being done, she saw poor Pushpamala dipped waist-deep in the water of the tank and heard her uttering the words, "O my poor husband, gone for ever from me."

This was too much for Parbati, and she said to Shiva, "Lord, she must have her husband back."

What could the god then do, but stop the chariot? He took the form of an old Brahmin, and she of an old Brahmini, and they appeared before the object of their pity. They asked her the cause of her lamentation, and she said, "Father and mother, listen to my tale. I left my parents and the royal splendour of their palace in company with our kotál's son, whom I loved, but whom, in spite of the promise they had previously made, they did not recognize as a fit suitor for my

[1] The goddess Durga.

hand. He has just been killed by a dacoit." Shiva said in reply, "Well, let us have the head, and turn your eyes away from us." After a good deal of hesitation, lest she should be deprived of her lover's head, her last consolation, she did as desired. A moment elapsed, and when told to look back, what was her surprise to find her dear one standing by her in the full panoply of a warrior, and a chariot flying overhead in the air. The lovers, overjoyed at their re-union, spent the day and the greater part of the night there, and starting some hours before dawn, reached a beautiful garden in another kingdom. Feeling very drowsy, the kotál's son proposed that they should get down from their horses and rest awhile. His proposal was accepted, and overpowered by sleep, he succumbed to it, the princess sitting by, with his head on her lap.

As the morning sun was rising in full splendour, a woman approached them. It was she who supplied the palace with flowers, and she came into the garden to gather them. Now this woman was a witch, and she had the power by a single glance to turn a human being into a beast. She cast her spell, a wreath of flowers, on the two figures before her, and immediately the kotál's son was changed into a long-bearded goat. Over Pushpamala, however, her spell happily had no power, the princess being a *Sati*. But who can picture the girl's surprise? The whole world was vanishing before her eyes and the ground slipping from under her feet. For a space she stood dumbfounded. Seeing her beloved following the witch, she left him, and with the bridles of the horses in her hands walked towards the palace. The people round about admired her in her soldier's garb, for she was still so equipped. The sentinels at the gate, prepossessed in her favour, recommended her to the king, who offered her the post of a guard, to keep watch at the eight gates of the palace, the remuneration being three gold mohurs a day.

Now it chanced there was a *Shankhini*[1] of enormous size in the country, which committed great havoc among men and

[1] A snake.

beasts, and which no one so far had been able to kill. Orders were at length given by the king to Pushpamala, alias Ranjit, to free the country from the pest ; and having for several days watched for it, she discovered that it every day visited a tank. She asked the king for three days' leave of absence from the gates, and this being granted, she, with food sufficient for that time, climbed up a tree by the side of the tank, and remained there in expectation of seeing the snake. At the end of the third night it came to the spot to quench its thirst, felling the large trees on its way with terrible lashes of its tail. Having quenched its thirst it went away. Pushpamala saw this, and expecting the monster's return the next night, had recourse to a stratagem to entrap it. With this object she propped up the trees, so that they might appear to be standing firmly, although liable to fall at the least shock. The snake came back as expected, and when its huge tail, moving this way and that, struck the trees, they fell upon it, and it could not shake them off. Seeing it thus arrested, Pushpamala got down from the tree, and with one stroke of her sword cut off its head. But what was her wonder to find that out of the snake's trunk came the witch who had turned the kotál's son into a goat. The witch fell prostrate before the princess, and said :—

"I see in thee the personification of chastity. Thou hast freed me from the torments of hell."

"Who art thou?" asked Pushpa.

"I was thy mother in my former birth," replied the witch. "I broke my pledge to the kotál's wife, and have been punished in this birth. I was doomed to pass the day as a *malini*[1] and the night inside the snake which you have killed. As a snake, I have ravaged thy father's kingdom."

"O my mother, am I indeed thy daughter?" cried Pushpa. "In me thou hadst a viper nested in thy breast. But I fulfilled thy vow in marrying the kotál's son."

"My Pushpa, my darling, come to my bosom," exclaimed

[1] A gardener.

her mother. "Greatly do I rue my having turned thy husband into a goat. I did not then recognize thee. Oh, how can I make amends for what I have done? Take the snake's seven heads, take this basket of flowers, and they will stand thee in good stead. Dear daughter, I have another confession to make. I turned into goats kings and kotáls, five thousand and two in number, of whom I have as a snake eaten all but one; and their bones are lying in a heap in my house. Wash the flowers in this basket in water, and sprinkle it on the bones. The dead will then rise into life. And as for thy lover in the goat, the touch of one of these flowers will bring him to his former self."

These were the last words of the witch. When she had finished speaking she fell down and expired. Pushpamala, sorely afflicted at the sad story of the witch, her mother, went to the garden in front of the house she had occupied, and being much wearied on account of the vigils she had kept for four successive nights, fell asleep with the snake's heads by her side. The gardener at dawn came there, and finding them, took them to the king, and said, "Mighty lord, you sent your sepoy, who is made much of, to kill the snake. There he is asleep in the flower garden, while I have done the work for which he was commissioned. Here are the snake's heads." The king believed what he heard, and having liberally rewarded the gardener, sent a body of soldiers to fetch the sepoy, to answer for neglect of duty. The soldiers went out, and finding him asleep, caught hold of his turban, and gave him such a pull as to displace his garments; whereupon the young soldier stood transformed into a girl of ravishing beauty. Pushpa hung down her head in shame, and followed the soldiers into the royal *durbar*. The king was astonished to behold the charming figure before him, and asked the gardener how she could have been found asleep in Ranjit's place, and what had become of him. The gardener was speechless; but the soldiers explained everything. The king then addressed Pushpa in these words:

"Who are you? and why did you assume disguise? Surely you disgraced yourself and your family, and sought shelter in my palace. Be off." But Pushpa replied, "O king, the father of the fatherless and the helper of the helpless, listen to me before I leave your presence. In the house of the gardener before you, there are a goat and heaps of bones of a thousand and one goats. Let me have them, I beseech you." The king asked the gardener if what the girl said was true; but the gardener denied every word. Pushpa, at this, stepped forward and said, "O Maharaja, send your men to verify my statement. I have to charge your gardener with another falsehood. Let him, with his face towards the sun, affirm that it was he who killed the snake, and not I." The girl's manners impressed the king with the truth of what she said, and he sent men to the gardener's house to see if the goat and bones were there, reserving for the time being his verdict on the question as to who had killed the snake. The girl, with folded hands, again said, "O gracious majesty, allow me to remain in the palace for four days more, for I have vowed to do so. On the morning of the fifth day I will leave here, but not before I have seen the goat and the bones brought from the gardener's house." The king granted her request, and Pushpa remained in the palace, pondering over the past and the future.

The four days came to an end, and on the morning of the fifth day she was summoned by the king to appear before the crowded court to say what she knew about the goat and the bones, of which she had spoken and which were at that time lying there. She came, clad in female attire, and said, "O king, give me your permission to tell you a story connected with the matter before you." The king nodded his assent, and she continued thus, "Witness sun and moon, witness the elements, the truth of what I say. I was a king's daughter, affianced by my parents to our kotál's son before we were born. My parents afterwards broke their promise, and we, partly to redeem their word, and partly in obedience to the

flame of love within us, left home and were married. Our married life has, till the present, been one of misfortune. See here the goat, which is my husband transformed by magic; and these bones are those of a thousand and one goats, into which as many kings and kotáls were changed."

The speech being ended, she followed the advice of the witch in her dying moments, and her late victims stood up in their natural forms, to the infinite surprise of the whole court. The gardener, in extreme horror, was heard to cry aloud:—

"O save me, Pushpa, my darling! In my former birth I was your father, but I could not recognize you till now. I have become a *mali*[1] for the sin of having violated the oath I made with regard to your marriage. My sin is now expiated to some extent, but at this moment I shall be changed into a ram. Only you will be able to bring me and your mother, who is now a jessamine flower close at hand, into human existence again, and this you can do by taking the flower off its stem and placing it on my head." In the twinkling of an eye there was a fierce-looking hairy ram in the gardener's place, and the whole court was in utter amazement. The sight was unbearable to Pushpa, who, leaving her husband to see that the ram might not go out, went in search of the flower, and having obtained it, she placed it on the animal's head. Immediately her father and mother regained their natural forms, and the king left his throne to receive them. After a friendly conversation it was settled that Pushpa and the kotál's son should be formally married. A priest was brought, and the wedding concluded with great rejoicings.

After spending a few days in that kingdom, Pushpa with her parents and her husband went to her own country, and the first thing she did was to revive the people there who had been destroyed by the witch. The old kotál and his wife rose into life again to embrace their son and daughter-in-law, and every one in the kingdom resumed his usual avocation. Pushpa's life after this was one of unalloyed happiness.

[1] Gardener.

III

MALANCHAMALA
THE WREATH IN A FLOWER GARDEN

THERE was once a king who was supremely happy save for one thing. He was childless, and this one sorrow dimmed all his happiness. Though he did everything that was enjoined in the Shastras, he knew that Fate was against him. One night he dreamed that a godlike form appeared and told him that he would have a son if he could, on the day of the next full moon, at one attempt, dislodge two mangoes from the tree nearest to the palace. After obtaining them he must eat one and give the other to his wife. Thinking this to be a divine communication, on the morning of the day appointed, the king went to the tree, attended by his friends, ministers, and other important officials. His first attempt to bring down the mangoes failed, and though he shot at them with arrows, and pelted them with stones, they still remained hanging on the tree. All his attendants were also unsuccessful in their attempts, except the *kotál*, or prefect of police, who at last brought down the mangoes and handed them over to his master, to the latter's infinite delight. The party having returned to the palace, the king ate one of the mangoes and made the queen eat the other, and at the end of ten months and ten days a son was born. There were great rejoicings; a thousand drums and as many trumpets rent the air, and presents and alms were given to all, without distinction. Six days passed in this way, and on the evening of the sixth day

the *Shetara Puja*[1] was performed, after which the whole palace anxiously waited for the advent of the god Bidhátápúrush at midnight, to write the child's fortune on his forehead. The god came in due time, and when, after fulfilling his mission, he was leaving the room, he touched with his feet the gardener's wife, who had come with the flowers required for the Puja, and who after long waiting had fallen asleep at the door of the room. Suddenly aroused out of her sleep, she seized the feet of the god, and threatened to detain him until he told her what he had written on the child's forehead. After much altercation, the god was compelled to reveal the secret, the most important part of which was that the new-born prince was to live only for twelve days. The sad communication was next morning made known to the king, the queen, and all the inmates of the palace; and loud cries of lamentation filled the house. The king consulted astrologers, and they advised him to make an appeal to the gods for the prolongation of his son's life. The advice was followed; and the gods, moved by his prayers, sent, after a long consultation, one of themselves in the form of a Brahmin to tell him that they had reversed the decree of Bidhátápúrush, and that the prince would live a long life, provided he was at once married to a girl twelve years old. Delighted at this communication, the king, without delay, sent men to look for a princess of that age, for he would not marry his son to one of lower rank. But the messengers returned unsuccessful in their mission, and the parents of the child became ill with grief until one day the kotál, partly out of sympathy with his master and mistress, and partly to aggrandize himself and his family, sought their chamber, and with the greatest humility offered to the new-born babe the hand of his daughter, Malanchamala, who was of the prescribed age. The couple in their dire distress could not but accept the proposal. The kotál, however, on reaching home was roundly abused by his wife, whom he had not

[1] A Hindu ceremony performed on the sixth evening following a male child's birth, at which food is distributed.

consulted in the matter. On being informed of her husband's intention she cried out in anger, "What! shall I consent to my daughter's marriage with a babe who is to live only for twelve days? You are determined to ruin my dear daughter, who has never had much happiness in her life as it is. She lay on the bed of illness continually for three years, and this has greatly weakened her; and now to join her fortune with that of one who is to live for only four or five days more is to doom her to perpetual widowhood. Go, tell your king that I will never consent to your proposal." Then turning to her daughter she said, "Come, Malanchamala, let us leave a country where such unhappiness awaits you."

But Malanchamala replied, "Mother! the match is too flattering to be rejected. It is known that the touch of a rough diamond cuts the hand, but still people grasp it with avidity. There is a precious gem within my hold, and if I can possess it, even for a short time, I shall feel myself highly blessed. To be a widowed princess is a matter of rare luck. But one thing, father, I should like to do, and that is to tell the king that I can marry the prince only on condition that he remains with us in our house during the greater part of our wedded life, and that the royal family eat the food cooked by my mother and myself, and further, that if the prince dies while under his parents' guardianship, his body be made over to me."

The kotál arrived at the court, and laid the conditions before the king. The latter, on hearing them, was furious with rage, and had the kotál put into chains and his daughter carried to the palace. The marriage took place, but it was a mere farce. The bridegroom was brought to the place where the ceremony was to be performed, crying at his mother's breast, and the bride soothed him by dangling him in her lap. The rite was hurried through by the priest, and the bride carried her husband into the bridal chamber. Even the elements seemed angry at this mock marriage. A furious thunder-storm broke over their heads, the wind blowing

down some portions of the palace, while a fire which suddenly broke out carried on the work of devastation. The prince was seized with a chill, and died in the arms of his wife. The king and queen, with a crowd following them, ran to the door of the room, and bursting it open, dragged out the bride. Attributing their misfortune to her and to her father, they ordered the latter to be beheaded, and inflicted unheard-of cruelties on the former. The next morning she was paraded round the city, astride a donkey, with *ghoul* poured on her head. She then had her eyes plucked out with red-hot pincers, and ultimately, as if the work of vengeance still remained incomplete, she was cast upon the pyre erected for her husband's funeral. But throughout all these indignities she was unmoved. Calmly she sat on the pyre, with the dead prince in her lap, unhurt by the fire, which after blazing for a time, was suddenly extinguished by an unseen agency. Days and months passed over her head, and she still sat with the dead body of the child at her breast. Demons, ghosts, hob-goblins and other evil spirits came to her, and with jaws wide open, danced round her, saying, "Give us the corpse, and we will make a feast of it." But the look that she cast upon them was so fierce in its intensity that even they fled before it.

At length a beautiful girl appeared before her and muttered some *Mantras* over the dead child, which at once recalled it to life. After this, other visitors daily brought milk and other necessaries for the prince; and Malancha passed her days in his company, regardless of her own privations and dangers. The infant smiled, and she smiled with him. He cried, and she was unhappy. She bathed him with her tears, dried his body with her hairs, and putting the black paint beneath his eyes, kissed him a thousand times. The spirits of hell could not bear this happy sight, and to starve him they drank up on the sly the milk on which he lived. Malancha was forced at last to leave the place, and go with the child at her breast in search of fresh milk. She went far without success, and while still seeking, she was waylaid by a tiger,

who called upon her to throw the babe to him, saying, "For seven days I have been fasting; give me the child and I will break my fast. You will have many other children in time, and it will be an act of piety if you now give me a meal."

"This is not my son, but my husband," replied Malancha. "Of what use to you will be this small bit of flesh? It will be like a blade of grass given to an elephant for food. Spare this poor infant, and eat me."

To which the tiger replied in surprise, "What! this is your husband? I will eat neither of you. Tell me what has brought you hither?"

Malancha thereupon told the tiger her history, on hearing which he exclaimed, "Mother! I stand as your protector. I will build a hut here for you, and as long as you will remain under my eyes, Death itself will not dare approach you."

"Thank you, tiger," said Malancha gratefully. "Can you tell me where I can get milk for my husband?"

"Milk is very rare here," answered the tiger. "But I will try and get it for you."

So saying, the tiger went on his errand, leaving Malancha crying in great anxiety.

During the tiger's absence, its mate came to the spot and said, "Who is it that is crying for milk in this jungle place? There is no milch cow in this part of the country. I can, however, give you some milk from my breast." Malancha gladly accepted the offer, and the tiger, who soon returned, without having succeeded in obtaining any milk, was delighted at the arrangement.

A hut was built by him for the poor girl, and the boy, who was named *Chandramanik*,[1] thrived on the milk of the tigress, his playmates being her cubs. Five years passed in this way, when one day Malancha told the tiger that she was weary of her solitary life, and that she had begun to long for human companionship again.

[1] Moon-like.

"You want to leave us?" exclaimed the tiger. "What is it that you want? Tell me, and you shall have it."

"My husband is a king's son," replied Malancha, "and now that he is five years old he must be put to school, so that later on he may be qualified to fill his proper position."

"There are learned scholars here," the tiger assured her, "and I can get as many of them as you like to tutor your husband."

"No, uncle, forgive me," Malancha answered him. "I will go and live in the nearest town, where you may visit me as often as you please."

The tiger at length yielded, though with great reluctance, and the objects of his love and care left him. It was a great blow to him, to the tigress, and to the cubs; and they suffered greatly on account of it.

The kotál's daughter and the prince, in the meantime, reached in four days a large stretch of jungle from which there seemed to be no outlet. They were too tired to move on, and so they sat under a tree near a flower garden, belonging to a *Malini*, which had produced no flowers for many years. The tank in it had become dry, and it was obvious that no one had recently visited the garden. On the approach of the two travellers, however, the garden became suddenly full of flowers, and bees and butterflies crowded there. The malini, noticing the change, ran towards the garden with great delight, and was greatly surprised to find the strangers seated under a tree. She thus addressed Malanchamala—"O Mother! who are you? a human being, a goddess, or a *peri*?"

"I am neither a goddess nor a *peri*, but a houseless girl, wandering about with this dear boy," replied Malancha sadly.

"Come into my house," cried the malini, full of sympathy. "This is not a fit place for you. I had a sister's daughter, who has left me these twelve years. She was like you in age, beauty, and every other respect, and you remind me much of

her. As a favour, live with me. I will call you niece, and you in return shall call me aunt."

At length it was settled that Malancha and the prince should live with the malini. Malancha thought that though the arrangement would in no way give her access to society, yet from there she might come to know the events of the outside world. At the request of her hostess she ate the stale rice given her, and gave the milk placed before her to Chandramanik. When it was evening she did the domestic duties appropriate to the hour, and retired for the night.

The malini within a short time obtained a modest income from the garden, and had two new rooms built on to her house, in one of which she herself slept, giving the other to her guests, and leaving the old room vacant for the time being. One day Malancha asked the malini if any arrangement could be made for the education of the boy with her, and was told that he might be sent to the *Guru* in the palace, who besides teaching the princes, received other pupils, no matter whose sons they were. Chandramanik, therefore, went there daily for instruction. Seven years passed in this way, during which the relationship between him and Malancha was kept hid from him, as well as from the malini.

One day, the king's daughter was admitted into the school. After this she attended it daily, but made no progress whatever. Her seven brothers asked her the cause of this; and she coldly confessed that the malini's boy (as Chandramanik was reputed to be) had so beautiful a face that she could not avert her eyes from it, and attend to the lessons. The explanation displeased the princes very much, and they thought of a plan to get rid of the boy. It was suspected by the princes that he, the son of a poor *Mali*, had but a scanty wardrobe, and therefore, to scare him away from school, they told him that if ever he presented himself before them, except in nicely washed clothes, he should lose his head. Deeply wounded at this, he went home with tears in his eyes, and told Malancha the reason. The latter immediately calling the malini into her presence,

asked her to procure him clothes surpassing in quality those worn by the princes, at the same time putting into her hand a diamond which she had brought from her father's house. The girl's desire was fulfilled, and on the next morning Chandramanik was at the *pathsala* wearing his new dress. The princes were astonished, and their sister, with looks of delight, exclaimed, "See, brothers! Here is before you the moon of heaven in human form. This youth can never be a mali's son." The words cut the brothers to the quick, and they conspired to put him into new difficulties. They told him that, clothed in so gorgeous a dress, he must not walk to the school, but come in a vehicle befitting his clothes, otherwise they would cut off his head.

The poor boy went home more dispirited than before, and being asked the reason, unburthened his mind. Malancha, rich with the money obtained from the sale of the diamond, engaged for him the next morning a *Chatúrdola*.[1] In this the boy went to the pathsala, to the confusion of the princes and the joy of the princess who now gave out her determination to marry him, since it was evident, she said, that he was no ordinary being. But the princes were still full of venom against him, and proposed a horse-race, on the condition that if he failed to be the first to reach the goal he should forfeit his head.

The circumstances being related to her by Chandramanik, Malanchamala, leaving him with the malini, started in quest of a fleet horse. Her purse was full, and she knew that she could buy an excellent one. The search extended over many days until she reached a kingdom where the king and the people were in deep mourning. She asked the cause, and was told that a great calamity had befallen them. The swift winged mare of the king had gone furiously mad, devouring men and beasts, destroying all that came within its reach. Being under some strange influence which she could not account for, she ventured to approach the mare, and told her that she was wanted by Chandramanik. The mare seemed to

[1] A richly furnished vehicle borne by men, and used only by the wealthy.

be startled at the name, and exclaimed, "O lady, my name is Hari Harikali, and my birthplace is Chandrapur. Can you tell me where Chandramanik is?" Receiving an answer to her query, the mare ran forward, telling Malancha to follow with as much speed as possible. On they ran, until at last the mare led her into the kingdom of Chandramanik's father. The people recognized their kotál's daughter, and reported her arrival to the king. The king and queen rushed out, and being convinced that it was she, were surprised to see that she was still alive, bearing no marks of injury on her body. They ascribed it to the intervention of the gods, and implored her to stop and tell them if a similar miracle had taken place with regard to their son. Malancha gave no heed to what they said, but ran on, till late at night she returned to the malini's house. When the next day dawned, Malancha fully equipped the mare, and Chandramanik, too short to vault into the saddle unaided, was helped up by her; and pretending to see how he looked on horseback she cast a tender look up at him; and under pretence of cleaning his shoes took the dust from under them and put it, as if carelessly, on her head. The boy remarked it and said, "Who are you, and what are you to me?" Malancha said, "I am a kotál's daughter, engaged to look after you."

The mare, with the rider, reached the palace, and the princes were astounded at the sight. So good a horse they had never seen, and they at once set their heads together to devise fresh means of bringing to grief the man whom they supposed to be but a mali's son. At length they came to the conclusion that, since their word had been given, the race must be run, in spite of the superiority of their rival's horse, consoling themselves with the thought that even if he won, by virtue of their position, they could have him beheaded afterwards.

The race was run, and Chandramanik proved the winner. The princes, feigning admiration, asked him to come with them into the palace, with the intention of making away with him. The simple youth was deceived, and turned towards the

palace gate; but the mare refused to move in that direction until forced to do so by whip and spur. As soon as they reached the tower at the gate, the princess, from the balcony, cast down a garland of flowers which encircled the young man's neck. The princes were much puzzled. The idea was forced upon them that the garland was of betrothal, and that therefore they could not harm him openly. They racked their brains, however, to discover some means of injuring him; and relating the circumstances to their father, asked him to call a council to determine the course to be taken. At the same time they bribed the councillors to advise him to do something that would remove the man they hated from their sight. They succeeded, and the decision was that the mali's son could marry the princess only on the condition of being after the wedding incarcerated for fourteen years. That night the nuptials were celebrated, and the wedded couple, after three days, were separated, and the bridegroom was cast into a dungeon, with an iron chain round his neck.

Malancha heard of the wedding in due time, but she was not at all displeased at the thought of having a rival. She thought, however, that it would have been better if she had previously informed Chandramanik of the relationship between them. But what had been done could not be undone, and she waited for the return of her husband. But four days passed, and he did not turn up. At length, on the morning of the fifth day, the mare returned without its rider, and the poor wife, suspecting something wrong, threw herself upon the ground in a paroxysm of grief. Recovering somewhat, she called the mare to her, and tied upon her neck a letter addressed to her husband's father, to the effect that his son was to be found in the kingdom of Raja Dudhbaran,[1] married to a princess, but cast into prison. She then left the malini, saying that she would go to her own country and drown herself in her father's tank, so deep was her grief.

In the course of her journey, she reached the place where

[1] The Raja of milk-white complexion.

her old friends the tiger and tigress lived, and falling prostrate before them she cried out, "Oh, dear uncle and aunt, feed upon me; for I am loath to live."

"Mother! what do you say?" replied the tigress. "You are the light of our eyes. See, we are half dead at our separation from you. Where is the child? Where is that jewel of a boy whom I fed from my breast?".

"Uncle and aunt! he was my husband, and I have lost him," she answered. "Raja Dudhbaran's daughter, Kanchi, has married him, and now he has been cast into prison."

Then the tiger spoke. "Follow me," he said, "and I will help you to get your husband back. Take these few hairs of mine and keep them twisted in your hair, and you will pass invisible. Now let us go to Raja Dudhbaran."

In the meantime the mare, Harikali, took Malancha's letter to her father-in-law, and he having read it very attentively, at once started with a large army to liberate his son. After a long and wearisome journey he reached the malini's house, which had been referred to in his daughter-in-law's letter. After some talk with the woman, he wrote to the Raja Dudhbaran, informing him that he had come to demand the safe delivery of his son, Chandramanik, who being mistaken for a mali's son, had been unjustly cast into prison. But the letter did not produce the expected result. Dudhbaran challenged Chandra's father to a fight, and a fierce battle ensued, ending with the total defeat and capture of the latter.

Leaving him in captivity, let us see what Malancha was doing. With the tiger's hair twined into hers, she immediately entered the dungeon where her husband was, lifted his emaciated form from the ground, and embracing him, imprinted a thousand kisses on his cheeks. Delay was dangerous, and she commenced breaking the chain around his neck with her teeth, which had been made sharp and unyielding as a file by her having chewed a leaf the tiger had given her. Link after link fell to the ground,

till Chandra, free from the chain, took Malancha by the hand, and strong with the tigress's milk he had drunk while young, burst open the door of the dungeon.

The tiger and the tigress meanwhile entered the palace, and made a feast of the men and the animals they came across. The seven princes were devoured, and the princess Kanchi would have met the same fate if Malancha had not burst in, and overcome with grief cried, "Oh, uncle and aunt! have you destroyed every one here? Are Chandra's relations by his late marriage all killed? Is she who married him out of pure love alone lost to him for ever?"

The tiger replied that no one of the royal family was alive, except the princess; and that she too must fall under his and the tigress's jaws. At this Malancha, beating her head upon the ground, adjured them to spare the girl. Her request was granted, and being told by the tiger to get some water for him to appease his thirst, she went to the nearest tank, where as fate would have it Chandra's father, released by the tiger, had come to wash himself, after having left the company of his son and his newly acquired daughter-in-law, who had a few minutes before been introduced to him. Malancha bowed down to him, and on being asked who she was, told him. Who could then picture the look of terror that he cast upon her? Shouting to his attendants, he cried, "Let us be off at once. We have fallen into the hands of that horrible witch, the kotál's daughter." But they replied, ".May it please your majesty to note that this kotál's daughter has saved your son's life, and brought you here. It is she, again, who has got the prince out of the dungeon, and it is not proper to treat her thus." But the king only cried out, "No, no, she is a witch, and I will never permit her to step into my kingdom." Whereupon the king, Chandra, Kanchi and the others started homewards.

Being thus left behind, Malancha went to her friends, the tiger and tigress, and told them how she had been insulted by her father-in-law. They asked her to remain with them,

which she did for some months, until the desire of seeing her husband again overcame her.

Taking counsel with the tiger and tigress she asked them to get a dozen Chatúrdolas; one for herself, two others for them, and the rest for friends of theirs whom she would like to take with her to overawe her father-in-law, and thus induce him to receive her. The arrangement was made, and Malancha, with a number of attendants, duly reached her destination. The tiger was the first to visit the king and inform him of the arrival of the guests. He told him also that Malancha was one of them. But the king, without a word, gave the tiger a kick, and ordered his bowmen to shoot down the trespassers. At this the tiger withdrew in a fury, and asked Malancha's permission to devour the whole palace, except Chandra only. Horror seized Malancha at this suggestion and she cried out, "Uncle, do not say so. I will worship my father-in-law's feet. I will wipe them with my hair. The next time I hear you speak thus, I will kill myself." The tiger, loving her as his daughter, was filled with fear at the threat, and remained quietly at the palace gate with her and his other companions. When seven days had passed thus, the tigers left her, and she sought her mother's house. The latter, torn with grief for her husband, was in extreme distress, and the mother and daughter, after living together a few days, resolved to make an end of their lives. With this intent they went one night to a tank, into which the kotál's widow threw herself, and thus put an end to her life and its sorrows. Her daughter, however, shrank from following her example, for the remembrance of Chandramanik's face held her back. To die without a last lingering look at him was impossible for her; and she therefore left the tank. The desire of seeing her husband becoming too strong for her to resist, she devised the expedient of twining the tiger's hair into hers, and of thus becoming invisible, and at midnight resorted to the sleeping-room of her husband. There she found him in a sound sleep, with the ravishing Kanchi by his

side. She was enchanted with the sight. So great was her joy that she broke forth into a song, the purport of which was:—

"Oh, my dear, dear husband! to you I gave my hand, when you were only twelve days old, with death staring you in the face. I revived you through the blessing of the gods, fed you with tiger's milk, and brought you up, as your position required. Now I see you happy. May your happiness be everlasting. I pray for your father too, but only because he is your father. I love the girl beside you. May God give you both long life and prosperity."

When in her excitement her voice rose high, and the tiger's hair, disengaged from hers, fell to the ground, Chandra suddenly awoke, and seizing her by one end of her *sari*, he asked her who she was. She replied that she was a common maidservant. But he said, "No, that cannot be Your face is imprinted on my mind. You fed and nursed me, and you put me in the way of getting a wife in Kanchi; and though the idea is as faint as a dream, I know that it was you who took me out of that horrible prison. My benefactress! I will never more let you leave me. Tell me to whom I owe my life and this happiness."

Malancha replied that his questions could not be answered, as it was dawn, and the people in the palace would overhear her. But the prince pressed her in so loud a voice as to draw his father there. The latter was amazed to see the kotál's daughter, whom he detested, with his son, and he cried out, "It is the witch! She must be driven out."

"But, father," replied the Prince, "she has been always very kind to me. Why cannot you bear the sight of her?"

The king, however, only grew more angry. "Forget her kindness. She will kill you," he cried and then turning to the kotál's daughter, he rudely drove her away. "Be off, you evil witch. You shall lose your head if in the future you ever again thrust your presence upon my son." No repetition of the order was necessary, for Malancha, greatly alarmed,

quietly slipped out. Nothing was heard of her for the next twelve years. But during that time, calamities in quick succession fell upon the king and his house. Earthquakes, recurring time after time, destroyed the greater part of the palace. Diseases seized upon the king's person and undermined his vitality, until at last he became almost a living skeleton. Chandra had had seven sons, and these died one after another, and a thick cloud enveloped the whole kingdom. The king attributed all this to the unseen influence of the kotál's daughter.

But one day Malancha came near the palace and prayed for its prosperity, and all of a sudden things began to take a brighter turn. Fortune once more seemed to smile upon the kingdom. The prince's seven sons, who had long before been turned into ashes, came to life again. The ruined portions of the palace were restored, and the king once more enjoyed health and vigour. Chandra ascribed all this to Malancha, but he was laughed at by his father.

On a certain day the king went out hunting. Tigers waylaid him and his followers, and devoured the latter, leaving the former to find his way alone out of the forest. He walked on, and with lips parched with thirst, drew near a fountain to quench it. There he saw a beautiful and veiled lady with a pitcher full of water, and eagerly begged her to give him some. His request was granted, and he thus poured a blessing on her head: "Whoever you may be, mother, you are a light in your father-in-law's house. May you be happy." The lady was no other than Malancha, who bowed to her father-in-law, put on her head the dust of his feet, and expressed in grateful words her happiness in being kindly spoken to by him. His feelings then were too strong to be restrained, and he wept at the remembrance of the cruelties she had received from his hands. He begged her to follow him home, and she replied, "Oh, how happy am I to-day! I have been recognized by my husband's father.

Father, I do not seek the grandeurs of the palace, let me dwell in a hut, but permit me to serve you."

Whereupon the king cried out, "Mother! foolishly have I persecuted you. Forget it, and grace my palace with your presence."

But Malancha excused herself saying that before being shut up in the palace she must visit her uncle and aunt, the tiger and the tigress, and her friend the malini. It would be ungrateful not to tell them how happy the king, her father-in-law, had made her.

To this the king gave his consent. "But return soon," he implored her, "and in the meantime I will garnish my kingdom in your honour. Bring your uncle and aunt back with you." Saying so, he left for home, and Malancha for the habitation of the tigers. They were pining at her absence, but on seeing her their hearts overflowed with joy. She told them of her good fortune, and invited them to her father-in-law's. They promised to come with her, and after appointing a day for their departure, she sped to the malini's. The poor creature had missed her greatly. Fortune had proved unkind to her after the departure of her guests, and she had often sobbed out their names. At the sight of Malancha, she was in a transport of joy, and they embraced each other with assurances of lasting friendship. The malini was then informed of her guest's good fortune, and asked to accompany her to her husband's home.

Malancha visited the neighbouring palace, deserted and partially destroyed, and weeping bitterly in pity, lit seven lamps with *ghee* and prayed fervently to the powers of heaven for the resuscitation of the king, queen, and their seven sons, and their restoration to their former grandeur. Her prayers were heard, and having completed her good offices there, she returned to her country with the tiger, the tigress and the malini. But her work was not yet finished. She succeeded in making the tank where her mother had drowned herself to disgorge her fresh with life and energy, and with her as well

as her friends she repaired to her father-in-law's palace and was received with loud acclamations as the first wife of her husband. The kotál, her father, was also brought back to life. In order to make amends for his wrongs, he was given by the king half of his kingdom, and he passed his days in great happiness.

Raja Dudhbaran, who had followed Malancha, then took his farewell; but he did not omit making very sincere acknowledgments of the manifold benefits she had showered upon him. His daughter became sincerely attached to Malancha and permitted her to share with her the company of her husband. The kotál's daughter, once the object of bitter persecution, became the sole mistress of the kingdom, and nothing was done without her approval. Not only did the royal family enjoy peace and happiness, but the whole kingdom resounded with her praise: "Malanchamala, goddess in human shape, abide with us for ever and ever."

IV

KANCHANMALA
THE GOLDEN WREATH

IN the days of yore, when India was governed by Hindu chiefs, there were in each kingdom four families occupying the highest rank—the king's, the prime minister's, the chief merchant's and the head police officer, or prefect's. The story we are about to tell concerns the son of the chief merchant in a particular kingdom. He was named Ruplal,[1] and he was generally beloved and admired. His old father, anticipating death, thought of settling his son in life, and therefore was on the look out for a wife for him. When the idea of marriage was haunting the young man's thoughts, he one night dreamed of a girl of the colour of gold and with hair as black as a dark cloud. The dream so occupied his mind on the following morning that he could think of nothing else. While out for a walk, and brooding over it in a pensive mood, the malini who supplied flowers to his mother and sisters met him, and struck by his apparently sad humour, asked him the reason ; and on his describing his dream, she said that a woman like the one whom he had seen in it was to be found in her house, and that she could show her to him if he came there. Eagerly he followed her, and she brought before him her niece, closely veiled. She showed him the girl's hair, and her complexion, by exposing her hands and feet. As to her face the malini said that it must remain veiled as long as Ruplal would not pledge himself to marry her.

[1] The centre of all attraction.

Ruplal, returning home, described to his father and his friends the beauty he had seen in his dream, and said that he would never marry any one except the *facsimile* of his vision. The father, though afraid that a girl of that description could not be found, sent messengers to see if they were able to find one. They came back unsuccessful, and the merchant was in despair, when the malini informed him of her niece, whose charms, she said, were no less attractive than those of her whom his son had dreamed of.

Ruplal's dream was not a fiction. There was actually in a country far off a princess in every particular corresponding to the image in his mind. Her name was Kanchanmala, and at the very moment he dreamed of her she had also seen him in a vision. The next morning she appeared before her father, and informed him that a young man named Ruplal, who had appeared before her in a dream, was according to the decrees of fate, her husband; and that he must be found out, not only to make her happy, but even to preserve her life. The king and his ministers were astounded to hear her, and messengers were despatched in every direction to find out who and where Ruplal was. They crossed seas, rivers and mountains, till at last they reached the foot of a banyan tree. Here they rested; when another body of men approached them, and the latter, being asked whence and with what object they came, said, "For months and months we have been travelling, and are fatigued to death. Oh, what a dream of our master's son that was! There may be in the world no such Kanchanmala as he dreamed of. Can you, brothers, throw light on the matter?" Those addressed exclaimed in surprise, "What do you say? Are you looking for Kanchanmala? Our princess bears that name, and we have been out for months seeking for a solution of the mystery. One morning she said to her father, our king, that she had dreamt of one Ruplal, and that she should die if he were not brought to her. Hence we are trying to discover his whereabouts." Both the parties, understanding that their mission was at an end, embraced one

another and exchanged pictures of Ruplal and Kanchan for the satisfaction of their respective masters.

Ruplal's picture coming into the hands of the king and his daughter, the latter recognized it as the true likeness of him she loved. Men were accordingly at once sent to the merchant, and all the preliminaries being settled, a day was fixed for the marriage of the lovers.

The malini, whose object was to get Ruplal into her clutches by having his hand joined to that of her niece, one day called on him and expressed surprise that he was going to be married to another, and not her niece. To which he replied that he had found the girl of his dream, to whom he would be bound for life. The malini, however, was not a woman to be thus got rid of. She asked Ruplal if he had seen his Kanchanmala's picture, and being told that he had not seen it himself, but heard of it from every one in the house, she was greatly delighted to think that there were still opportunities for carrying out her purposes.

The day came to a close, and at night Ruplal took the picture from his father, retired into his room and lay down to sleep, keeping it on his bosom. The malini, somehow or other, coming to know of it, crept into the room while he was immersed in deep sleep, and stole away the picture. Taking it home, she ordered her niece to spoil it so that the person represented in it might appear blind and crooked. The niece was too good a girl to consent, and so the malini at length did the mischief herself, and returning to Ruplal's room she placed the picture in the same position from which she had stolen it, and went away.

Ruplal, on awakening, uncovered the picture, and holding it out to look at it, was greatly surprised and disappointed to find in it the representation of an ugly creature. Tears started to his eyes, and he cast wistful looks all around in search of some one to whom to communicate his thought. The malini was at hand, and officiously advised him to abide by his and his father's promise to bring the ugly girl home as his bride,

and at the same time to keep at as great a distance from her as possible, for she was a witch, and even a look at her face was dangerous. He was also told to blindfold himself at the time of marriage, or at any other time that she might be within the range of his vision. Poor Ruplal was deceived by the wicked woman, and followed her advice, both at the time of his marriage and after he had brought his bride home. He placed a thick covering over his eyes, which he did not remove while in the bridal chamber. He left it the next morning, and never afterwards sought the company of his wife, who pined away neglected. The old merchant died, and it was attributed by Ruplal, at the suggestion of the malini, to his wife's evil influence as a witch. A hut was built for the poor girl, and there she lived, the wreck of her former self.

Ruplal after his father's death had to attend to all his business, within and without, and so he could no longer keep the shade over his eyes. One day when it was removed, the wily malini set her niece before him, and he was so taken with her beauty that he at once asked for her hand. His suit was granted and the marriage fixed. But the event was not permitted by heaven to take place. Whatever arrangements the malini made in anticipation ended in failure. The priests whom she consulted died, the ladies whom she invited lost their husbands and sons, and the articles bought were consumed of themselves. The malini's garden became a wilderness, and she was in want for her daily bread. On the other hand Kanchanmala, reconciled to her lot, passed her days in works of devotion and in great peace.

Ruplal's business failed, and he was compelled to think of a voyage to foreign countries, whence he might bring such goods as would find a profitable sale in his own country. Preparations were duly made, and the day of starting was announced. The night before, Kanchan managed to enter his bedroom to bid him farewell, but he drove her out. The morning dawned, and he got into one of the boats ready for the voyage. The sails were unfurled, and the rowers plied at

the oars, but the boats did not move. The men asked Rup if he had displeased the gods, or left undone some duty enjoined by them; and when he said that there was no fear of that, one of the helmsmen asked him if he had taken leave of his wife; and on his saying "No," advised him to return home and do so. He agreed to do as advised, and with some of the men went again blindfolded to Kanchanmala and said, "Unfortunate girl! I am about to start on a voyage, and I ask you to part with me in good grace. On my return home I will present you with a garland of pearls, and gold bracelets."

"You are my garland of pearls, my invaluable gem," Kanchan replied. "Take me with you as your servant."

"Oh, my men! Let us be off," cried Ruplal, disregarding her.

But the boatmen refused, saying, "We can't be off until you get leave from your wife."

"O wife! consent to my going, and I will fetch vermilion for your head," cried Ruplal.

But Kanchan again replied, "You are my precious vermilion. Take me with you to serve you."

"What is to be done?" shouted Ruplal in anger to his men. "Are you sure that the boats won't move because I have not taken leave of her?"

"Yes, we are sure," they answered. "You, sir, had better take her with you."

No further delay was possible. Kanchan's request was granted, but she was placed in an old shattered boat. Rup's boats made a speedy voyage, while the one occupied by her lagged considerably behind. Her husband, however, could not go beyond her sight.

The malini, in the meantime, burning with jealousy, took her niece with her, and ran along the bank of the river by which Rup's boats passed and shrieked at every port that of the two passengers in them, one was a ghost and the other a *Petni*,[1] and that they should be avoided. This was done

[1] A mischievous female ghost.

chiefly to prevent Rup from taking any necessaries from the ports; but he had no want of anything, and therefore they were passed by. The malini had then recourse to a charm, whereby she made the boats dash against a *Chur*,[1] and Rup and the crew sank under water. Kanchan, being a *Sati*, was not only safe herself, but saved her husband and his men from a watery grave. The former, however, was under an hallucination; he attributed the good office to the malini and her niece, though they remained invisible.

The boats sailed on until a town was reached where a *Puja*[2] was going on, the object of worship being a goddess fond of human flesh and blood. Rup was taken out of his boat, selected as the sacrifice, and carried to the place by the side of a tank where the offering was to be made. His head was cut off and rolled on the ground. Kanchan, who had run after him, reached the cruel spot, and sitting by the pool of blood, took the head upon her lap and rent the air with her lamentations. Her cries reached the ears of Shiva and Durga, driving through the air in their chariot, and they in pity descended and restored Rup to life. But the wicked malini and her niece were still in his mind, as his good angels.

The boats again set out on their voyage, and reached a country where a terrible famine raged. For seven months Rup and his men were hardly able to get their food. At last Kanchan, obtaining the favour of *Annapurna*,[3] managed to get the best dishes for her husband and his people, and the fool Rup, instead of thanking her, expressed his gratitude to his unseen friends the malini and her niece. There is a proverb, "Talk of the Devil, and he is sure to be there," and it was true in this case. The malini, with her niece, got into Kanchan's boat, and cast her into the water to be drowned. Rup was then told by the malini to take off the covering from his eyes, and this was the first time he had done so since he had left home. He beheld a lotus leaf floating, and taking it

[1] A sand-bank. [2] Religious worship.
[3] The goddess who supplies men with food.

up, he saw on it the true likeness of Kanchan, as he had seen her in his dream. The malini at this tore her hair, and her niece fell in a swoon.

Kanchan had seven sisters, as dancing girls at Indra's court, and by the falling of the bells that tinkled at their ankles they knew that their sister on earth was in danger. They at once made their chariot ready, and driving downwards to where Kanchan was struggling with the waves, they rescued her, and placing her on the chariot, drove it through the air. Rup at that time saw his folly, and reproaching himself for having allowed himself to be so duped by the malini, stretched out his hands in the hope of catching Kanchan's garment; and failing to do so, he fell insensible.

How long the fit lasted we cannot say. But when Ruplal came to, it seemed to him as if a hundred years had passed over his head. His hair was grey, his skin shrivelled and his body shivering with infirmity. In this state he returned home and consulted holy men and astrologers as to the religious ceremonies to be gone through and the sacrifices to be offered for the recovery of his health. They told him that the cause of his disease was a look of displeasure cast on him by one of the beauties of heaven, and that the only chance of his becoming his former self was to find some one who loved him so much that, fasting for a whole day, she would imprint kiss after kiss on the whole of his diseased body. They said also that the person doing so would immediately afterwards be transformed into a palmyra tree. Now the question was, who would do so much for him, at so great a sacrifice. Ruplal went to his mother and said, "Mother, I am your son, and who can love me more than you? Take off my disease and when you will be turned into a palmyra tree, I will place sheets of gold round its foot."

But Rup's mother replied, "Alas, son! it is your duty, now in my old age, to help me to make pilgrimages. Instead of that you want me to be a palmyra tree. This is what I never expected of you."

Rup then went to the malini, and she drove him out, disgusted with his loathsome appearance. But her niece called him back and promised to free him from his disease. She fasted the whole of the next day, and kissed the whole of his body, bringing upon herself the doom foretold by the wise men. And Rup became once more a young man, with his former personal charms. Fortune smiled on him, and his business prospered, making him the master of immense treasure. But the hand that was showering the blessings was unseen. It was that of Kanchan, now in heaven.

After some time, Rup was again called upon to start on a voyage. He did so to his advantage, and returned home a millionaire. One day, while he was moodily passing by the palmyra tree into which the malini's niece had been changed, a drop of water fell on his head. He looked up and caught a piece of cloth hanging down. It was a part of Kanchan's *sari*. She was seated on the crown of the tree, and thence addressed her husband thus, " My husband, I am your slave, and I thank you for your kind looks. You have made me happy, but I have stood in the way of the malini's niece. My sisters thought of coming here to-night to restore her to her former self. Now that you have touched me they will not come."

Ruplal, completely staggered at this revelation, sat down on the ground quite dazed, with his hands to his head. Kanchan, however, assured him that further grief was unnecessary, and that she would from that time remain at his side, on condition that he would let her have her own way at night, and that he would not question her as to her movements, however strange they might appear. She then promised that in seven days she would give him back the malini's niece. After that they went to Rup's house. There they spent several days very happily, without any new occurrence. But soon afterwards Kanchan one night left her husband while he slept, and went off unknown to him.

Rup, waking up, missed her and waited for her, feigning sleep. When the dawn was about to break she returned, and threw herself on the bed. The next night she again went out, while her husband pretended to be asleep. She returned at midnight and tried to awaken him, but he neither moved nor gave any sign of being awake; and so, three times putting the dust of his feet on her head, she again quitted the room in tears. Rup ran out of the room by another door, and finding his wife in the chariot of heaven that he had once seen, he got on to it from behind, unperceived. The chariot reached heaven, and Kanchan went into Indra's hall and commenced dancing, Rup concealing himself behind a pillar and observing what passed. One of those who were playing on instruments could not keep time with the dance, and the gods and the dancers were very much displeased, and Rup, who was an adept in instrumental music, could not resist the temptation of moving to the spot, snatching away the instrument from the awkward musician, and playing on it himself. The scene was then turned into one of voluptuous music: *tum tum tum*, went the *dhole* (drum) *whang whang whang* went the sound of the *tanpura* (a musical instrument supplied with chords), and *pat pat pat* went on the dancers. The fascination that surrounded Rup was observed by his wife, and she could not help casting looks of love and approval at him. Indra marked this, and also the fact of his being a human being, and guessing that he was Kanchan's lover, hinted to her that the secret was no longer hers. At this she blushed in confusion, and falling prostrate before the god, admitted the truth, and prayed that she might from that day be excused from attending his court. Her prayer was granted, and not only that, but Indra made a gift of the chariot which had so long been at her service, offering at the same time any other boon she might ask. Encouraged thus, she asked the fan in his hand, with the object of bringing back the malini's niece to life, for fanning with it was known to possess the power of reanimating the

dead. Her prayer was granted, with the caution that the fan should not be moved in the wrong way.

With grateful acknowledgments for the favours received, Kanchan left the celestial regions, and in the twinkling of an eye reached the terrestrial. She then went to the palmyra tree into which the malini's niece had been changed. But the tree was not there; for the wicked malini had by the assistance of the evil one changed it into a snake, doomed to pass its life in the adjoining tank; the loving service the girl had rendered Rup having stirred up the witch's venom against her. The shock was so great for Kanchan and Rup that they fell into a swoon. This did not escape the eyes of Indra in heaven; and alighting where they were, he ordered his *Oirabat*[1] to drink up the water of the tank. The elephant did his bidding, and a snake with a hooded head was seen at the bottom. The god touched it with one of his toes and it vanished, leaving in its place the malini's niece, in full splendour of beauty. The reptile, however, was alive, and walking on its breast to where the witch was, bit her on the heel and dragged her before Indra, who at a glance turned her into a frog. Justice done, he left the scene, blessing his favourite Kanchan and her husband with long life, and ordering that the malini in her changed body should ever remain in the custody of the snake, which would continually torment her with its fangs, but never swallow her up and thus put an end to her sufferings. The god advised Kanchan to reward her who had suffered so much for Rup's sake by taking her as the co-sharer of his bed. The advice was gratefully followed; and the merchant passed his days happily with his two wives, Kanchan of course being his sole guide in matters temporal and spiritual.

[1] Indra's favourite elephant.

V

SHANKHA
THE GARLAND OF SHELLS

THERE was in a certain country a merchant with a son and a daughter. The former was in due course married to a girl in every way suitable; but the latter, being humpbacked, no one consented to be tied to her in the bonds of matrimony. In course of time the merchant died, leaving his wealth and business to his son, *Shankha*,[1] then a young man. The youth, however, was solely given up to amusements, and never pursued any vocation that might prove profitable. His mother often expostulated with him, but in vain. At length, having run through the fortune he had inherited, and unable to make both ends meet, he left home without the knowledge of his own people, in search of adventures. For three years he was absent, and his mother and wife fretted away. Separation from him was not the only source of their trouble. They were extremely poor. Shankha's creditors ousted them from their home, and they lived in a hut, the husking of rice for others being their chief means of subsistence.

One day a heron came to the hut and told the mother that a prince, named Mohun, was shooting birds on the side of the nearest lake, and that he could tell her where her son was. She ran to the prince, and hearing that Shankha was on the other side of the lake, ran to meet him. Shankha was in a reclining posture on the ground, with two flutes lying by him,

[1] A conch-shell.

and in spite of his mother's solicitations to go home, he ran away. But when she bewailed aloud her lot and that of his poor wife, Shakti, his heart was melted, and coming to her he said, "Mother, I will go to foreign countries on a mercantile enterprise as father did. But where am I to get ships and goods of merchandise?" The mother in reply said that she had long before buried a gem, got from the head of a snake, and the sale of that would enable him to get more than enough for his voyage. The proposal was greedily accepted by the young man, and fourteen ships, richly laden, were soon ready for departure. Religious rites proper for the occasion were performed, and after a very pathetic farewell he left his country, leaving his wife with a sword and instructions to keep it by her at night with the doors shut; and receiving from her in return a garland of shells, which, as she had learned from her tutelary goddess, would serve as a talisman.

The ships unfurled their sails at an auspicious moment, and in six months reached a harbour. Here Shankha's men anchored and made arrangements for cooking their food, while their master retired and engaged himself in the study of the Shastras. It soon became night, and he overheard the conversation of two very large birds, *Bangoma* and *Bangami*, gifted with foresight. The latter asked her mate to tell her the young merchant's fortune, and Bangoma said that though he knew it in full he would reveal only one circumstance, and that was that Shankha would soon get a godlike male child.

"What are you talking about?" said Bangami.

"The man is far away from home and there is no knowing after how long he will return, and yet you foretell the speedy birth of his son."

"There is a gigantic swan close by, called Manik," replied Bangoma, "and he, if asked, will take the man hence to his house in a few minutes; and thus he may remain with his wife for a time."

Shankha left his study and called on Manik to do him this service. The swan took him gladly on its back and in

twenty minutes dropped him in front of his house. He called to his wife, who, startled at his sudden appearance, opened the door of her room and joyfully received him. Together they passed the night, and at dawn, communicating to the girl the motive and means of so sudden a return, he once more got on the back of the bird and departed. On the way Manik spoke thus to him: "Your wife will bear you a godlike child, but great afflictions are in store for her. Unlimited will be her sufferings during your absence. Leave the garland of shells with me, or you will lose it to your subsequent undoing."

Shankha would not part with it as it was very dear to him as his wife's gift, and the bird, instead of pressing him further, reached the ships, and placing him in one of those, his own ship, left him with the assurance that as soon as he should utter the name "Manik," the bearer of it would appear before him, no matter how far away he might be. The ships were launched the next morning, and prosperous gales drove them onwards.

Let us now have a peep into the house of Shankha's mother, and see what was going on there on the morning succeeding his visit to his wife. His sister, getting up early and sweeping the yard, saw shoe-marks leading up to Shakti's door, which at once produced in her the suspicion that the latter had during the previous night received a lover. Knocking at the door, and having it opened, she saw a candle burning. This confirmed her suspicions, and in very opprobrious terms she abused Shakti, and roused her mother and the whole neighbourhood with outcries that rent the air. Quickly a conclave of the dames and damsels, most of whom delighted in scandals, took place, and mercilessly Shakti's character was torn to shreds. All except the girl's mother-in-law voted that she should be turned out into the streets, but that old lady, more mercifully disposed, decided that she should be kept at home, but under severe restraint. From this time the girl's sufferings were very great. She was not allowed sufficient food, nor any clothing save tattered

garments, and to crown all she regularly received daily a number of lashes from her sister-in-law. But she bore all this with patience. The tide of public opinion gradually became more favourable, the more so when she gave out the circumstances accounting for the shoe-marks and the burning candle. But the humpbacked wretch, her tormentor, persecuted her the more until one day in a fury the latter turned upon her, and kicked her out of the house. Trembling, she fled away, not knowing where to go. Her tears rolled down in torrents, and her sobs almost choked her.

Her mother-in-law too was in despair. The poor woman, heart-broken at her daughter-in-law's misfortune and the cruelties inflicted on her by her daughter, was weighed down by griefs, and always cried for the return of her son.

In the meantime Shakti plodded on her way through woods, over mountains and across rivers, and after seven months reached the skirts of a solitary desert, so tired that she could no longer move an inch forward. She fell down and remained insensible for seven days and nights till she was awakened by the footsteps of bears and tigers, kindly ministering to her. They brought her their own food, which she did not touch, but their care and their companionship rendered her some solace, and she remained with them for some time. One morning, before dawn, a wood-cutter happened to come near her, and ravished at her unusual beauty, thought her to be the goddess of the woods, and with clasped hands begged to be told if she wanted anything of him. She replied that she only wanted him to make a hut for her. The wood-cutter at once consented, and a hut in a short time was built, but when he proposed to fetch some money for her, she borrowed from him his bill-hook, and cut a branch of a sandal tree that stood by, and gave it to him with the instruction that he should sell it to the first bidder, taking whatever was offered as the price. It was arranged also that the product of the sale should be shown her. The wood-cutter went away with the branch, and for weeks

frequented palaces, thronged marts and ports, in search of a buyer. But no success attended his endeavours, and so his travels continued.

In the meantime, his wife was very uneasy at his absence. One day she started with the object of tracking him, and searched the whole of the district in which she lived, ultimately reaching Shakti's hut. Struck by her splendid appearance, she bowed down in reverence. But her feelings underwent a sudden change when she discovered the marks of her husband's hands on the mud plaster on the bamboo fencing of the hut. She suspected that the girl before her was his mistress. His late absent-mindedness and hurry to leave home confirmed her suspicions, and she poured forth on her suspected rival a torrent of abuses. She noticed, too, that the girl before her was about to become a mother, and attributed it to her *liaison* with the wood-cutter.

Seized with jealousy, the wood-cutter's wife went to a place at some distance, where her friend, a witch, lived, her employment being that of a midwife. Her object was to commend the services of the latter to Shakti, so that she might destroy by charms the infant about to be born. They both came to the hut and saw in it a new-born babe of unrivalled beauty lying on its mother's bosom, and in the courtyard heaps of gold mohurs. Seizing these and the child, they left the spot with the greatest possible speed. The mother, who had been in a swoon, suddenly awoke, and not finding her child, ran like a maddened tigress in search of it, bewailing her lot thus, "O Bidhi, what have I done to offend thee? I never snatched away a child from its mother's bosom or a calf from the cow that suckled it. I never went so far as to separate a fruit from its tree, or to plunder a bird's nest of its offspring."

Nature sympathized with her; the earth shook, stars fell down from the firmament, and the beasts ran before her as if to help her find out the missing child. She at last reached the seashore and fell down faint, exclaiming, "O gods! for

what sin have I been thus punished? Why are you so cruel? You have separated me from my husband and home, and behold now I am the most wretched of my sex! O Bidhátá-púrush,[1] why didst thou unexpectedly give me a child, and hast now robbed me of it?"

While her cries were rending the air, her husband's garland of shells suddenly fell into the sea; and the witch of a midwife, with the wood-cutter's wife, reached the palace where the queen, who had for some time been in labour and given birth to a dead child, was herself dead. The midwife on entering the room of confinement and finding how matters stood, made the wood-cutter's wife put on the Rani's *sari*, and ordered her to play the august lady's part by taking into her breast Shakti's baby, who was substituted for the still-born child of the king. The midwife then ran to him and announced the birth of an heir, and the whole palace resounded with the beat of drums and the blowing of trumpets. The king entered the room of confinement and feasted his eyes with the sight of the boy.

The wood-cutter's wife admirably acquitted herself as the queen. No one detected her. The babe thrived and was named Neelmanik. With his growth, grew the wealth and prosperity of his reputed father. At length, he was put into the pathsala in the palace, and his progress in learning far surpassed that of boys of the same age. His intelligence was so remarkable that the king invited him to his durbar, to take part in its discussions.

Going back over the past twelve years, we find the garland of shells fallen from Shankha's neck and carried by the waves to Manik's nest near the shore, where his mate hid it. The loss of the garland produced consequences very unfavourable for Shakti. No longer under its talismanic power, her husband quite forgot her, and pursued his business without for a moment remembering that he had left at home his spouse, as loving and beautiful as any wife could ever be. Manik,

[1] Providence.

one day playing with its young ones, discovered the garland, and was very much afflicted at the thought that the loss of it entailed such sorrow and misery on Shakti. The garland, however, which was then given by the gods the power of speech, consoled the bird saying, "Neelmanik lives in such and such a place on the right bank of the Nerbudda. Take me to him, and you will be glad at the result."

The swan with its family went to the place and built a nest on a banyan tree. The wreath was with them, and in a tussle between the young ones it fell down, just as Prince Neel was riding by. Its sight attracted him, and dazzled by its beauty, he had it picked up by one of his attendants, and wore it round his neck.

We left Shakti lying faint on the seashore. The dashing of the waves roused her, and on opening her eyes she beheld the sea goddess, who embraced her and carried her to the subterranean regions. She remained there for twelve years; and knew no peace, as her heart was torn with the memory of her husband and her son. One day the goddess, taking pity on her, told her to leave her and go, with the winds to guide her, towards the north, where she would find both her loved ones. The girl, beside herself with joy, bowed to the goddess, and being taken to the land, went northwards as directed.

The reader has surely not forgotten the wood-cutter sent by Shakti to sell the piece of sandal-wood she had given him. He had gone from place to place in search of a purchaser, but had found no one willing to buy it. Twelve years passed in this way, and at length he met in a harbour a rich merchant with fourteen ships, richly laden. He accosted the latter very respectfully; asked him if he would buy the sandal-wood, and held it out for inspection. The merchant, who was none else but Shankha, took it in his hand, and what was his surprise to find in it the first letter of his wife's name, inscribed with her own hands! The letter reawakened his memory, which had so long lain dormant, and he was so worked on by the old

associations it revived, as to lose all control over himself and roll on the ground, uttering words of bitter lamentation. Having recovered a little, he offered the wood-cutter anything, however precious, that he might ask, if only he would tell him from whom he had got the wood. And the wood-cutter, telling him every particular with regard to it, was taken into one of the ships, to show the way back to Shakti's hut.

Shakti in the meantime was assiduous in her search after her lost treasures. She left behind her city after city, kingdom after kingdom, till by some evil influence she could not account for, she was led back into the kingdom where the hut she had lived in stood. She reached it at night, and reposed on the embankment of a tank near the palace. At dawn the wood-cutter's wife who was personating the queen, attended by her maidservants, came to the tank for a bath, and she was surprised to see Shakti there, in the ravishing splendour of her charms. At first the pseudo-queen could not recognize her whom she saw after twelve long years; but on closer inspection she found that the form before her was that of the girl whose child she had taken away. She then thought within herself, "Ah! she whom I persecuted twelve years ago is come back, surely to take revenge. She was then in rags, but now she is dressed like a princess. I must ruin her." After this soliloquy, she bade her servants kill the lady, alleging that with her beauty she might be her successful rival if perchance the king saw her. The maid-servants laid hold of Shakti by the hair, despoiled her of her garments and ornaments, and threw her into a neighbouring cave, the mouth of which they shut with a large flagstone.

Just then the sounds of *Danka*[1] reverberated through the precincts of the palace, and soldiers hurried to the landing place on the bank of the river to see if any belligerent power had made its appearance. And when they found that the Danka was being beaten from ships belonging to a mere merchant, they became angry at the effrontery, and seizing the

[1] A drum announcing the visit of a man of consequence.

vessels, took their owner bound in chains to the court. The king ordered the confiscation of the ships with their goods, and the close captivity of the merchant, who was no other than our old acquaintance, Shankha.

The prisoner was passing through the palace gate into his prison, when he saw the heir apparent with the very garland of shells that he had lost. He told the kotál who had him in charge that the royal youth was none other than his son, and that he wore round his neck what had belonged to him alone. The kotál could not maintain his gravity at what he heard, and so loud was the derision the captive's words gave rise to, that most of the nobles in the court went there to see what was the matter. Shankha, instead of being cowed down by their presence, maintained his point; and to punish his impertinence, a thousand swords were raised over his head, whereupon he cried out, "Kill me, but with my last breath I will proclaim that that boy is my son." Nobody listened to him, and he was led into the prison.

The occurrence produced a strange effect on Prince Neel's mind. He left the court in ill humour, and for three days he was distraught. He shunned appearing in public at the court, and one day calling in his friends, the prime minister's and the kotál's sons, proposed a bath in the neighbouring tank, which was near the one in which Shakti was lying engulfed. The friends could not say "no," and with them Neel went to the bathing place. The bath having refreshed him, he proposed to wait there a little while, and the three friends sat on the very stone under which the prince's mother, unknown to him, lay. The mere touch of the stone refreshed him a great deal, but a strange feeling, the nature of which he could not determine, seized him, and he fell insensible. Shakti was conscious of the nearness of her son and she said, "Who touches the stone over me? My heart is lightened. I was robbed of my darling while asleep, something tells me that I shall soon have him in my arms again." She then cried out, and her cry caught the ear of Neel's friends, who were

confounded to hear it come from underneath the stone. Again the cry was, "O my moon! now that after twelve years you are near me, let me embrace you."

Neel's companions were at a loss to solve the mystery. That a voice could be heard from under the ground, and that a stranger, a merchant, claimed their prince as his son, were puzzles to them; and having by the most assiduous attentions roused Neel, they communicated to him the strange words they had heard, and at his request removed the stone. A lady of great beauty was then visible, and something told Neel that it was his mother. He addressed his friends thus, "Brothers, while lying on the stone I dreamed that I was reposing on my mother's breast, and she whom I saw in my dream is the very lady before us. She must be my mother, and I will never leave her."

His friends tried to make him believe that he was being deluded, and led him into the palace, for the solution of the riddle by the queen. Neel fell at her feet, and asked her if she was in reality his mother, but she, with a great fear at her heart, said, "Neel, what do you say? What nonsense are you talking?"

"Mother, tell me, as if you were standing before your tutelary deity, whether you bore me in your womb, or that lady near the tank did so," Neel adjured her. The wood-cutter's wife, ostensibly the queen, roared forth—"Wretch, were you born in a hovel, and thence brought to sit on a throne? A witch has taken possession of you. Ho! who is there, get a *rojha*[1] so that my son may be freed from the evil influence under which he seems to be." Neel at this harangue left the woman's presence, to think out what his best course was. The rumour had got abroad that he had been claimed as her son by a witch; and this so cut him to the quick as to compel him to seek solitude, for he could not bear public criticism on a point so near his heart. One day he saw his friend, the prime minister's son, and consulted him on the difficult question.

[1] An exorcist.

After much cogitation, the prime minister's son pointed out what seemed to be a very plausible way. He suggested that the method whereby the real mother could be found out was to try the range of the milk which the two claimants had in their breasts; and she whose milk, being propelled by pressure from a particular distance, would reach his mouth, should have her claims of maternity acknowledged by him.

Neel at first jumped at this suggestion, but afterwards doubted it, and told his friend that though what he had said would be a very good test, it was not possible. For no mother could be expected to have milk for her child after the lapse of so many years since its birth, and even if she had, no drop of it could pass over a considerable distance. At this, his friend replied that prayers to the gods can make impossibilities possible.

Neel the next morning approached the king, who was already aware of the witch's claim, which he thought foolish, and asked him to hold the proposed test before his full court. The king agreed; and the matter became public. The wood-cutter's wife heard it, and went to her friend, the midwife, for consultation, who told her not to flinch, but to eat Shingi fish, and other kinds of food that generated in the breasts a copious supply of milk. The sham queen took her friend's advice.

The next morning the court assembled, and the yard of the palace became quickly crowded. The wood-cutter's wife made a grand appearance befitting a queen; while Shakti was clad in rags. Then the prime minister's son said aloud, "O most august assembly of the best in the land! and O queen! and the lady in apparent poverty! Prince Neel has one mother to be sure, and that one must have her rights."

Shakti and the wood-cutter's wife were made to stand twelve yards off from Neel. The false mother tried the test, and taking different positions, standing, kneeling or sitting, she pressed out her milk, which did not pass even half the distance. The assembly cried out, "Stop, queen, stop. It is

an impossibility that you are trying, the trial itself is absurd and foolish." Being thus addressed, the wood-cutter's wife stood aside, mortified and annoyed.

Shakti then pressed her breasts, and thirty-two times the milk flew out and touched the prince's lips. The king trembled on his throne, fearing that he should lose his son, who springing from his seat, threw himself into the close embrace of his real mother; and the musicians present played stirring notes in congratulation. The woman who had so long passed as his mother was looked upon by him with scorn, and she, in order to take her last hit at Shakti, required her to name the boy's father. On this demand, the lady became embarrassed, for on the night of her husband's last return to her, he had strictly enjoined her to keep the circumstances of Neel's birth a secret from every one but his neighbours. She cast anxious looks all round, whereupon a friend stepped in to help her. The swan, Manik, flew to the spot, and in the hearing of the king, nobles, and the mob assembled, related the history of Neel's birth, and of the garland of shells. Speechless with wonder, the king, with his attendants, ran into the prison and brought Shankha out, with apologies for having wronged him. Great honours were conferred on him, and the courtiers attended on him and did him honour. Shakti before this had been taken into the palace. She had not heard of her husband's imprisonment or release, nor of his arrival in the kingdom. So she was very disconsolate on his account. She would neither eat nor drink, but continued crying, until her son appeared before her with the joyful tidings that his father was under the same roof with her. Beside herself with delight, she urged the boy to take her to his father, and when the long-separated couple met, they fell upon each other's necks and shed hot tears of joy.

They extorted a full confession from the wood-cutter's wife, and expelled her and the wicked midwife, her accomplice, from the palace. The former returned to her house in the forest; but what became of the latter is not known. Shankha

was pressed by the king to reside permanently with his family in the kingdom, and his son was nominated heir to the throne. The merchant, however, left the country for the purpose of going to his own home to see what had become of his mother and sister. He reached there in safety, but what he saw almost broke his heart. The poor mother was a street beggar, while her humpbacked daughter was in like plight. The merchant took his mother along with him to his new country, but his sister, unwilling to accompany him, was reluctantly left behind to pursue her wicked courses which we have been told soon came to a close, owing to her being captured by an alligator while taking a swim in the very lake at the side of which their mother had once reclaimed her son.

Shankha returned to his family and his friend the king, and passed his days as happily as possible. Through his influence the wood-cutter was made a police officer of rank; and Manik the swan with his mate and young ones was a highly esteemed resident of the palace.

PART III

I

PRINCESS KALABUTTI

THERE was once a Raja who had seven wives. Their names were *Burra*, the eldest; *Meja*, the second; *Seja*, the third; *Nau*, the fourth; *Konai*, the extra one; *Dua;* and *Chhota*, the youngest. *Dua* means a woman despised by her husband, and the Rani so called was the eyesore of the Raja.

The Raja was a mighty potentate, dwelling in a vast palace, and possessing innumerable elephants and horses, and an inexhaustible treasury of gems and gold *mohurs*. In fact he had everything that the heart of man could desire. The palace was full of people, among whom were his ministers, body-guards, and soldiers. But he was not happy. All his Ranis had proved barren, and this he believed to be a calamity that betokened the displeasure of Heaven.

At length, on an auspicious day, a *Sanyasi* met the Ranis at their bathing *ghat*, and gave the Rani-in-chief, or the Burra Rani, a certain root, telling her that on returning home she must make a paste of it. She was then instructed to dissolve the paste in water, and having prepared the mixture, to drink a portion of it herself, distributing the remainder among the other Ranis. This, the Sanyasi said, would of a certainty change their barrenness into the blessed state of motherhood.

Language fails to describe the joy of the Ranis at this communication, and they hastened home in an ecstasy of delight. Fate, however, prevented them from doing the

Sanyasi's bidding at once. Certain pressing domestic duties had first to be performed. The eldest Rani had to cook rice, the second to prepare the vegetables, the third to make the different curries, the fourth to carry water into the kitchen, the fifth to act as the general assistant, the sixth, or the Dua Rani to grind spices, and the Chhota Rani to scale and cut the fish for the frying pan. Though busy with her duties, the Burra Rani was anxiously awaiting an opportunity of carrying out the Sanyasi's instructions, and when the time came she directed Dua Rani to prepare the paste. Dua Rani quickly made the required preparation, and eagerly swallowing a portion of it, took the remainder to the Burra Rani on a silver plate under cover of a gold cup. The Burra Rani took off the cover, quaffed a good quantity of the draught, and passed it to the second Rani. She took her share, and made over the residue to Seja Rani, who after doing justice to her own demands, gave what was left to Konai Rani. Very little now remained in the basin, and she could not help swallowing the whole of it. Nau, the fourth Rani, came in at this juncture, and was naturally much chagrined when she found nothing in the plate but the sediments. These, however, she utilized, and going to Chhota Rani, who had just then finished preparing the fish, thus exclaimed in sympathy—"Ah! wretched woman, you have not availed yourself of the preparation of the root; make haste, go quickly, and see how much of it is left." Poor Chhota Rani in great anguish ran to the spot, and bitter was her disappointment when she found nothing left for her. She fell to the ground, and rolled over and over in a paroxysm of grief. The other Ranis drew near, but what consolation could they offer? They blamed one another for having been so unmindful of their sister. Nau Rani, cleverer and seemingly more sympathetic than the others, said to Chhota Rani, "Come, sister, if there be any small fraction of the root left on the stone on which it was ground, I will mix it with water for you. This will, if it please God, make you the mother of a bright and beautiful child." To make the best of a bad case

PRINCESS KALABUTTI

Chhota Rani did as advised. Then they both went to draw water, leaving the other Ranis to talk over the incidents of the day.

After the lapse of ten months and ten days, each of the Ranis brought forth her offspring. Wonder of wonders! Nau Rani and Chhota Rani, respectively, gave birth to an owl and a monkey, while the other Ranis were each blessed with sons as charming in appearance as the moon.

The square in front of the apartments of the more fortunate mothers resounded with the beating of drums and trumpets, while there was nothing but lamentation in the quarters of Nau and Chhota Rani. The Ranis who had given birth to sons were escorted into the palace by their husband and his gorgeous retinue, while nobody deigned to notice the mothers of the monkey and the owl.

After a few days Nau Rani was made to work as a menial in the Raja's zoological establishment, and Chhota Rani was degraded to the rank of those who made and gathered cow-dung cakes for the fuel required in the royal household. Thus their days passed in great sorrow and distress.

In course of time the five princes grew up into handsome young men. The monkey and the owl, too, grew proportionately. The princes were named *Hirarajputra*, *Manikrajputra*, *Motirajputra*, *Shankharajputra*, and *Kanchanrajputra*, the first parts of their names respectively meaning Diamond, Precious Jewel on the Cobra's head, Pearl, Conch, and Gold. The name of the owl was *Bhootoom* and that of the monkey *Boodhu*.

The five princes used to ride on horses as speedy of motion as birds, accompanied by soldiers as their bodyguards, while Bhootoom and Boodhu passed their days on the *Bakul* tree near the hut occupied in common by their mothers.

The princes as they grew older became very cruel and oppressive. Not content with beating the people, they even at pleasure cut off their heads. The voice of discontent was loud everywhere. Bhootoom and Boodhu diverted themselves

by accompanying their mothers to the places where they worked, and assisting them. Boodhu collected cow-dung cakes for his mother, and Bhootoom lightened the toil of his mother by feeding the fledglings in the Zoo. Their attentions to their mothers did not stop here. When these ladies suffered greatly for want of the means of subsistence, Boodhu brought them delicious fruits of every description. Bhootoom, not to be outdone, brought in his beak a plentiful supply of betel-nuts. Thus the two discarded Ranis passed their days in sad privation and distress, only relieved by the devotion of the monkey and the owl, their children.

One day the princes rode on their fleet horses towards the menagerie. On their way they saw the monkey and the owl on the bakul tree, and said to their bodyguards, "Lay hold of the owl and the monkey, and bring them to us. We will keep them with us." On this, the attendants cast a net round the tree, and Bhootoom and Boodhu, unable to break through it, were caught and were taken to the palace, each in a cage; the princes being entirely ignorant of their connection with their captives.

Their mothers, on returning home from their work, found Bhootoom and Boodhu absent, and fearing some mishap, they threw themselves on the ground and rent the air with their cries.

On coming to the palace, Bhootoom and Boodhu were speechless with wonder at what they saw. There were spacious halls, elephants, horses, soldiers, sentinels, and many other astonishing things. They were greatly pleased, and thought thus: "Why do our mothers live in the hut? Why can't they and we live here together?" They then gave expression to their thoughts, and addressing the princes, said, "O princes, our brothers, you have brought us here, but why is it that you do not do the same with our mothers?"

The princes were astonished to find them talking like human beings, but they replied, "Tell us where your mothers are, and we will have them fetched into the Zoo, where they

will be well cared for." "My mother is a menial in the king's Zoo," answered Bhootoom. Boodhu also spoke of his mother as a servant whose duty it was to collect cow-dung cakes. At this the princes burst into a laugh, and said, "Is it possible for a monkey or an owl to be the offspring of a human being?" It was no wonder that they said this, for they did not know the sad history of Nau and Chhota Rani. But one of their attendants said, "O princes, what you think impossible has actually happened. Besides your mothers there were two Ranis, one of whom gave birth to this owl, and the other to this monkey. And they have both been disgraced and turned out of the palace."

Thereupon a great loathing seized the princes, and calling out "Shame! shame!" they kicked at the cages, and told their men to drive away the owl and the monkey. Then for recreation's sake they went out for a ride.

Now it was from this incident that Bhootoom and Boodhu learned that they were of royal parentage, and that their mothers were not originally menials. Boodhu said to Bhootoom, "Brother, the best thing for us now is to see our father. Let us go to him." At once Bhootoom agreed, and they set out together towards the palace.

Meanwhile the five Ranis, seated on a silver *khat* (bed), were engaged in making chains of gold for their foreheads, when a maidservant burst into their presence and said, "Your majesties, a boat, with its forepart shaped like the head of a parrot, is lying at the landing *ghat*. Its rudders are of silver, and the helm is cut from a diamond; and a girl with hair of the colour of a dark cloud, and complexion as fair and bright as the colour of a *kunch*,[1] is seated inside, talking to a parrot of gold."

The curiosity of the Ranis being excited to the highest pitch, they proceeded at once to obtain a sight of the wonderful maiden. The boat had unfurled its sails, but it was still near enough for the Ranis to address its occupant.

[1] An Indian seed; bright red, with a black tip.

"O damsel of kunch-like colour and hair of cloudy hue," they addressed her, "will you not part with some of the flowers of the lustrous pearl you are carrying?"

But the maiden answered, "What is this of the flowers of pearl? They are far from here, and your sons, if they would possess them, must cross the red river, free the three witches who guard the king, and come to Kolabuttipur." As the boat disappeared, each of the Ranis thought in her heart that she would send her son to win the hand of this beautiful princess, with all her wealth.

The maiden, who could read their hearts, said in reply, "Princess Kalabutti, of kunch-like colour, hails your sons to her kingdom. If any one of them can make himself master of the flowers of pearl, she shall be his."

After this the Ranis went home, and sent for their husband and their sons, telling them everything that had transpired between them and the Princess Kalabutti. On this the Raja at once ordered the Royal *Mayurpankhis*, boats made in the shape of a peacock, to be fitted out. The princes should set sail in them in quest of the pearl flowers.

The preparations for the princes to begin their voyage having been completed, the *mayurpankhis* were launched, each with a prince and his retinue on board. The Raja was present, and Bhootoom and Boodhu, who had meanwhile revealed their identity to him, were with him. They asked their father to order *mayurpankhis* for them also; but the poor Raja's tongue was tied by the presence of the five Ranis standing near. They forced him away into the palace without, however, omitting to give the owl and the monkey a number of slaps for what they considered their impertinence.

Bhootoom and Boodhu were resolved to follow the princes, and they went off to apply to a carpenter for a *mayurpankhi*. They had, however, been already forestalled by their mothers, who were intent on sending their offspring on the expedition. As an apology for a boat, each made a canoe of a betel-nut tree, and putting some *Durba* grass, paddy and *cowries* in it,

launched it on the river along which the princes had passed, the *durba*, the paddy, and shells being considered emblems of good luck. As an additional security for success they marked each canoe with spots of vermilion, and anxiously waited for the owl and the monkey. On returning from the carpenter's they saw the preparations made by their mothers, gladly availed themselves of them, and set out on their voyage.

The princes had meanwhile reached the kingdoms of the three witches mentioned by Kalabutti, and were, with all their retinue, at once seized by three old men who stood as sentinels, put into a gunny-bag, and taken to the witches, who regaled themselves on the captives for three successive evenings. But by a miracle the princes lost neither their lives nor their consciousness. One night, though confined within the walls of the stomachs of the witches, they talked to one another thus, when their devourers were asleep, "O brothers, we shall have to remain buried within these infernal creatures. No more shall we see our parents." While they were in this state of despair the owl and the monkey, having finished the first stage of their voyage, reached the accursed shore. No violence was done to them, and coming where the old women lay snoring, they heard what the princes said. Boodhu thought of a clever plan to save them. He extended his tail, which they eagerly laid hold of, and dragged them out through the nostrils of the witches, whom they forthwith despatched with the swords put into their hands by Bhootoom. Thus were not only the princes saved, but all their attendants also; and the *mayurpankhis* were again set afloat. But of poor Bhootoom and Boodhu the ungrateful princes took no further notice. The Rubicon, however, was not yet passed. There still remained the expansive and boisterous waters of the red river to be crossed. The current carried the boats far out into the adjacent sea, at the mercy of which the princes remained for seven days in fear of instant death. It was then in utter helplessness that they exclaimed, "Oh, for Bhootoom

and Boodhu! Were they here they could save us." Their cry was immediately answered, Bhootoom and Boodhu seeming to fall from the skies to their rescue. They tied their canoes to the side of one of the gorgeous *mayurpankhis*, and told the boatmen to sail northwards. Thus the princes were brought into a river safe for navigation, and were saved, but their ungrateful and wicked propensities still remained, and they callously ordered their men to throw the owl and the monkey into the water.

But the princes had yet another lesson to learn. Another disaster soon befell them, the *mayurpankhis* with their passengers and crews sinking to the bottom of the river. Some time afterwards Bhootoom and Boodhu happened to arrive there, and the latter told the former that he suspected some calamity had happened to the princes. Bhootoom said in disgust, "Speak no more of them. Let them go to the dogs." But Boodhu reproached him. "Shame, shame, brother," he said, "that can never be. I must dive under the water and rescue them. If you are afraid to do so, you must still help me. I will tie this rope round my waist, do you hold one end of it, and remain on the land. Do not pull it until you feel a jerk." Suiting the action to the word, Boodhu gave Bhootoom the end of the rope and dived under the water. Touching the bottom he found a way downwards into the earth beneath. Pursuing it he at length reached a palace, grand though deserted. There was only one woman, about a hundred years old, in sight. She was working at a *kantha*, which she threw at him when she saw him. Whereupon thousands and thousands of sepoys instantaneously burst into view. They put chains upon him, carried him into the innermost recesses of the palace, and confined him in a dark room where many voices accosted him and asked help of him. These were the voices of the princes and their followers. Boodhu understood what was required of him and had recourse to a stratagem. Next day he pretended to be dead and was thrown out of the room as such.

As soon, however, as he found that the coast was clear he got up and began inspecting the different apartments of the palace; and lo! on reaching the third story he saw the damsel with hair of cloudy colour who had visited his father's capital, and whom the princes were so eager to discover. He approached her from behind, and overheard her thus lamenting in the ears of her golden parrot, "Ah, parrot of gold, ineffectual has been my voyage in the boat with silver oars, since no one has come after me." While she was thus absorbed in her gloomy thoughts the monkey stole away the flowers of pearl bedecking the knot of her hair. He was not, however, quick enough to escape the eyes of the parrot, which raised the alarm, crying out, "Princess Kalabutti, thy flowers of pearl are in the hands of him whose bride thou art destined to be." The girl looked back in great excitement, and finding the monkey behind her, fell to the ground, weeping. But knowing that she was decreed by fate to wed him who came to her having safely passed through the red river, the kingdoms of the three witches, and the deep dungeon in her palace, she reconciled herself to her lot, cast the nuptial wreath round the monkey's neck, and swore eternal fealty to him. He asked her to release the princes and follow him to his country. She agreed, but said that, as fated, she could not be taken out save in a casket of gold. Boodhu adopted the proposed means, and after many fresh adventures, together with his bride in the casket, the princes and their retinue, including the boatmen and the old woman's *kantha*, finally reached the bottom of the river in which the *mayurpankhis* had sunk. Bhootoom, who had been meanwhile waiting patiently above ground, at last felt a strain on the rope he held, and dragged up Boodhu with his companions. The homeward voyage was begun, and the boats sped merrily onwards. One day the monkey was caught opening the casket and whispering to some one inside. The suspicions of the princes were roused, and they threw him, with the *kantha* wrapped round his body, into the water; at the same

time hitting the owl, seated on one of the masts, with an arrow, wishing him a watery grave. The casket was then opened, and the coveted damsel came out. Enraptured with the sight, each of the princes asked her if she would be his, and she replied that none could be her lord but he who was in possession of the flowers of pearl. The princes well understood her, and kept her as a prisoner.

The voyage came to an end, and the princes with Kalabutti were cordially received at the palace. The Ranis asked her to which of them she would give her hand, and she said that she would speak out her mind after a month—the period she had vowed to remain silent on the subject. Her word was accepted, and the princes were forced to curb their impatience.

In the midst of the rejoicings attending the apparently successful issue of the expedition, the mothers of Bhootoom and Boodhu, disconsolate at the absence of their darlings, and apprehensive of their death, were so greatly affected that they decided to drown themselves in the neighbouring river. They went to its bank intending to put an end to their lives, when suddenly the objects of their love burst into view with the sacred name of "mother" on their lips. Nothing could surpass the ecstasy that the two ladies felt. They hugged their dear ones close to their bosoms, and blessing the gods for restoring their lost treasures to them, took them home, rejoicing. The happy night following this lucky day came to an end, and people were in the morning surprised to find that a crowded bazar was held near the hut of the two Ranis who had been doomed by their husband to ignoble servitude, that a beautiful orchard had sprung into existence, and that thousands of soldiers were stationed on guard. Princess Kalabutti, being informed of this, went to the Raja and said, "The period of my vow is over, but I am not going to give my hand to any of the five princes. Dispose of me as you like." The Raja said in reply, "Mother,[1] I am not so great

[1] The Hindu method of addressing a girl or woman, to show great affection.

a dolt as not to understand all this. Is there none to fetch Nau and Chota Rani to the palace?" This speech of the Raja added fuel to the fire of excitement burning in Kalabutti's bosom, and she hurried off at the head of her whole Court to the two Ranis, and formally escorted them into the royal mansion. The other Ranis and their sons, in shame and sorrow, sought their own chambers. Bhootoom and Boodhu came into the Durbar, and made their obeisance to their father. Their stars were at last in the ascendant. Next day, with great *éclat*, Boodhu was married to Kalabutti, and Bhootoom to a foreign princess, Herabati by name. But a sad visitation fell upon the heads of the five princes and their mothers. The doors of the rooms in which they had shut themselves up were blocked up with mud and thorns, and they were left to die of hunger.

Time passed smoothly over the heads of the Raja and his people, when one night they were startled by the cries of Kalabutti and Herabati, who, waking out of their sleep, had respectively seen on their beds a monkey's and an owl's skin. The whole house resounded with lamentations at the probable death of Bhootoom and Boodhu, but every one was soon disabused of his error by the Raja's daughters-in-law who, peeping out of their windows, saw two princes of godlike mien on horseback, keeping watch at the palace gate. They recognized their husbands in the riders, understood what the mystery was, and at once burned the disguises their lords had assumed. Bhootoom and Boodhu were then formally acknowledged as Jubarajas, or heirs apparent to the crown. Their names were changed into Rupkumar and Budhkumar. The Raja, with his two reconciled Ranis, their sons and daughters-in-law, passed his days in great happiness till, stricken in years, he retired to the distant forest to seek his spiritual and eternal welfare, leaving the kingdom to his sons.

II

THE SEVEN BROTHERS WHO WERE TURNED INTO CHAMPA TREES

THERE was once a king who had seven queens, the eldest of whom was a living example of pride and insolence, while the youngest was noted for her uncommonly kind and gentle nature. The latter was the idol of her husband, whose chief aim was to make her happy. He was not, however, unkind to his other wives. They obtained from him everything they desired, and passed their lives in royal grandeur. But there was one thing that cast a gloom over the palaces. The king was childless, and the thought that if he died without an heir all his dominions and wealth would pass into the hands of a stranger greatly troubled him and his people.

In course of time, when all hope of an heir had been abandoned, the youngest queen showed signs that she would soon become a mother, and the king's joy was so great that he distributed rich presents to all who approached him. His attachment to the fortunate queen, and his impatience to know the fact of her delivery as soon as possible, became so great that he tied her wrist to his by a long chain, for the double purpose of always having her movements within his knowledge, and of being apprised without the least delay of the happy event, no matter what the distance between him and her might be.

When the time drew near, the youngest queen withdrew to her apartments accompanied by the elder queens, who voluntarily offered to attend her. Seven sons, exquisitely

handsome, and a daughter, the incarnation of the moon on earth, were born; and their mother expressed her wish to see them, saying, "O sisters, kindly let me feast my eyes with the sight of the babes to whom I have given birth." To this the other queens, with scornful gestures, replied, "Wretch, we admire your impudence; you want to see the fruit of your labour. See, you have brought forth young mice and frogs." Hearing this the youngest queen fainted away, and taking advantage of this, her rivals put her eight children into as many earthen pots, and buried them under the heap of ashes thrown away from the kitchen. They then shook the chain that had been intended by the king to signal the birth of his child, and in he rushed with a countenance beaming with unspeakable joy. But what was his disappointment to learn from the elder queens that the wife of whom he had made so much had given birth only to mice and frogs. He was beside himself with rage, and had the unhappy mother turned out of the palace. She was reduced to the greatest possible distress, and maintained herself by working as a *ghootah-kurani* (a woman who collects cow-dung cakes for fuel), while her rivals passed their time in gay festivity.

But a deep calamity seemed to have befallen the whole kingdom. The king always looked morose and grief-stricken, and his subjects heart-broken. A dark cloud enveloped the palace. Birds forgot to sing and flowers to bloom. The gardener, one morning, came to the king and said that there were no flowers in the garden to be offered by his royal master to the gods in his daily worship; but that there were eight trees, seven *Champa* and one *Parul*, bearing each a single flower, and growing on a heap of ashes near the kitchen. The king ordered the flowers to be fetched, and the gardener went on his errand. But as soon as he approached the trees, the parul (an Indian flower of red colour) said, "Ho, Champas, my seven brothers, are you awake?" "Yes, we are," came the answer; "what do you want of us?" "The king's gardener is here," replied the

Parul; "shall he have flowers for his master's devotion?" "No," said the Champas, "not before the king comes to us." Saying this, they climbed higher up their trees out of reach. The gardener was struck dumb with surprise, and reported the matter to the king, who instantly, with his courtiers, went to the spot, and was about to pluck the flowers, when the Parul called to her brothers in the same way as before, and asked if they would place themselves at the disposal of the king. The Champas answered in the negative, and said, "Let the eldest queen come, and then we will see what can be done." After this, they got a little higher up their trees. The eldest queen came, and the former scene was re-enacted, ending in a summons to the other five queens in succession; and by the time the last of them had arrived the flowers were seen in the sky, like so many stars. Then with a loud voice they cried, "Let the discarded queen, the one who lives by making and selling cow-dung cakes, come to us, and we will place ourselves at her disposal." On this a grand palanquin, fit only for kings and queens, was sent to her hut, and she was carried to the appointed place. With her whole person smeared with cow-dung, of which she had been making cakes, she reached the trees, and anon the Champas got down from the skies to where the Parul was, and out of the eight flowers sprang seven prince-like boys and a girl of uncommon beauty. They fell upon their knees before the discarded queen, calling her by the sweet name of mother, and told the king their sad story.

Every one was struck speechless. Tears flowed in torrents from the eyes of the king, and the other queens trembled with fear. They were at once buried alive, standing, with thorns placed below their feet and above their heads.

The king then entered the palace with his now honoured queen and her children, and from that time bliss and peace pervaded the whole kingdom.

III

SHEET AND BASANTA

THERE was once a king with two wives, one *Suo*, or the beloved; and the other *Duo*, or the despised. The former was very wicked, and heaped the greatest indignities on her rival. The elder queen was childless, while the younger had presented her husband with two sons, *Sheet* (Winter) and *Basanta* (Spring) by name. Though princes and heirs to the throne, the youths had to pass their days in great wretchedness on account of the secret ill-treatment they received from their stepmother.

One day the two queens went to bathe in the river flowing by the palace, and the elder queen said to the younger, "Oh, how dirty you are; come, let me wash your hair and put some oil on it." The object of this pretended friendship gladly submitted to the process; whereupon her rival adroitly put something on her head, by the magical virtue of which she was transformed into a parrot, and flew away. The elder queen came home and spread the rumour that the Duo queen had been drowned. The king believed it and was very sorry, the more so for the fact that his sons, whom he greatly loved, were left motherless.

The gilded parrot, into which the younger queen had been transformed, flew into another kingdom, and the daughter of the king of the place happened to see the bird, and asked her father to let her have it. Her request was complied with, and the parrot was brought into the palace in a cage of gold.

In the years that followed the elder queen gave birth to three sons, as thin as reeds. This increased the spite of their mother against their half-brothers, who were of a sturdy and robust constitution; and she continued to persecute them in every possible way. They were served with scanty meals of the poorest kind, while the Suo queen's sons fared sumptuously.

But their troubles did not end here. Their stepmother was determined to ruin them. She had recourse to charms to kill them, but these proved ineffectual. At length, one morning after they had come home from the Pathsala (school), she raised a great uproar, tore her hair, and in frantic rage called one of her maidservants and told her to report to the king that Sheet and Basanta had abused their stepmother in the filthiest language. The maidservant did as ordered, and the king entered his wife's room trembling with emotion, and asked her what the matter was. The queen said, "The sons of my rival have insulted and abused me. I must bathe in their blood." Uxoriousness was one of the weaknesses of the king, and without venturing to make a single protest he summoned the public executioner and ordered him to cut off the heads of Sheet and Basanta and bring their blood in a basin to the queen. The executioner bound their hands and legs and took them out, seemingly to be beheaded. Who can picture the torments which they suffered? Tears rolled down their cheeks at the thought of death, and they called upon the gods for deliverance. Their prayers were heard, and the executioner was moved with compassion. He removed their bonds, took off their garments, dressed them in the bark of trees and said, "O princes! I am in a terrible dilemma. The king, my master, has ordered me to kill you; and to save my head I should do his bidding, but my better feelings prompt me to do otherwise. When you were babes I took you upon my knees and fondled you; now I cannot injure you, and I will not, no matter what may happen to me. Go away in this disguise, and no one will be able to recognize you." Saying this, he showed the way they should take; and

to impose on his master, killed some dogs and jackals and took their blood to the queen, who, exulting in the success of her diabolical plans, prepared a sumptuous feast for her husband and her own sons.

Sheet and Basanta set out on their journey, but being unaccustomed to long walks, were soon very much tired. Basanta felt a great thirst and asked his brother if any water could be had. The latter said that he saw no chance of finding any spring, tank or river from which they might slake their thirst, but that he would go and seek one out. Saying this, he left his brother and went away. After some time he discovered a tank, and having no vessel with him was taxing his brains as to how he should take a little of the water for his brother, when suddenly a white royal elephant, with a throne on its back, approached him, and guided by certain signs of royalty on his forehead, took him up with its trunk, placed him on the throne, and hastened away through the jungles.[1] Sheet was very much troubled at heart at the threatened separation from his brother, and wept; but the elephant gave no heed to it. It hurried off at a great pace, and stopped only when it reached the palace whence it had come on its grand mission. As it set down the new king, the people received him with joyous shouts. With the crown on his head and the queens and the ministers with him, Sheet soon forgot his brother.

Basanta, having waited some time for Sheet, became anxious for his safety; and in the anguish of his heart searched for him far and near, till quite exhausted he laid himself down, filled with painful forebodings. His hunger and thirst increased until at last sleep, the only friend of the

[1] We read in Indian fables, that when a king died heirless and there was found nobody in the kingdom worthy to succeed him, the white elephant which had carried him, when alive, on its back, was sent abroad to select a substitute for him. The beast succeeding by its wonderful sagacity in finding out one fitted for the honour, at once took him on its back, and in triumph carried him into the country deprived of its ruler; and the people there, gladly availing themselves of its choice, made obeisance to their new king.

helpless and the distressed, sealed his eyes and brought him oblivion. Night came, and passed away, and at dawn a hermit happened to come to the spot, and saw him. The sage could perceive by certain signs that the youth lying prostrate before him was a prince, so taking him up in his arms he carried him away to his retreat.

Basanta passed his days in the hermit's abode in as much peace and happiness as circumstances permitted. He fed on fruits, bathed in fresh water, and served his protector in the best way he could. In the evening he sat up to a late hour, drinking in the spiritual instructions that dropped from the hermit's lips.

Leaving him here, we must follow the fortunes of his father and stepmother. As soon as their conduct to the Duo queen's sons became widely known, they became very unpopular. The subjects hated their king, and invited a stranger to dispossess him of his throne. Bereft of his kingdom and estates, he sought refuge in the forests, leaving the Suo queen with her three sons to beg from door to door. But her troubles did not end here. One day, while wandering about as a mendicant, she came near the seashore, and the waves rushing towards the land carried away her sons at one swoop to a watery grave. She rent the air with her lamentations, beating her breast and tearing her hair; and at length, taking up a big stone, hit herself on the head so as to extinguish the flame of life. There was none to mourn her loss.

We left the Duo queen changed by her rival into a parrot, and placed in a golden cage for the amusement of a young and beautiful princess. This princess, at the time which we have now reached in our story, was in the first stage of womanhood, and numerous suitors for her hand were invited by her father to try their luck at the *Sayambara*[1] that was to be

[1] *Sayambara* signifies a girl's selection of her husband. It was the custom with Indian kings to dispose of their daughters' hands in this way. He among them who had a marriageable daughter, invited numerous kings and princes, and on a certain previously appointed day made them sit in rows in an open place. The princess was

held. On the appointed day many suitors for her hand assembled in the hall of the palace and awaited the arrival of the princess in great agitation. But she did not appear. Decked in her bridal ornaments in the zenana, she was talking with her gilded parrot. "Tell me, dear parrot," she said laughingly as she finished her toilet, "is there anything else that I need to adorn my person?" The parrot replied, "Put on golden anklets." The princess did so, and the anklets made a pleasant tinkling sound. She again asked the parrot the same question, to which the bird answered that she must put on a crown made of the feathers of peacocks. The girl complied with this also, and asked the parrot once more if everything was complete. The parrot said, "No, you must wear round your neck a garland of pearls that are to be found in the heads of elephants. They are called *Gajamutty* (elephant-pearls) and they will rhyme well with your name, *Rupamoti* (the pearl of beauty)." At this the princess said that as there were no such pearls in her father's treasury, and as she could not marry without them, the Sayambara could not take place. "I will wed him," she said, "who will bring me these pearls. But if any of the kings and princes here present presume to make the attempt, and fail, he will have to remain as my slave for life." The message reached the guests, and they went away in search of *Gajamutty*. Reaching the seashore, reputed to be the haunt of elephants with pearls in their heads, they found herds of elephants there, but they were not the ones they sought. The beasts were wild in the extreme, and rushing upon their disturbers rent some of them with their tusks, treading others under their feet. The few that survived the onset returned foiled to Rupamoti, and according to the original contract, remained to serve her as slaves.

Dropping the curtain on this scene, we pass again to

then brought in to choose a husband from among the guests. And all that she had to do to show her selection was to place a garland of flowers round the neck of the chosen one, who was thereupon accepted as her betrothed.

Sheet, whom we left reigning in his strangely acquired kingdom. Hearing the particulars of the above Sayambara, he was fired with rage at the presumption of a woman to enslave kings and princes for having failed in an impossible task; and to make an example of her, he invaded her father's kingdom and carried her away captive.

Basanta, meanwhile, lived in the hermitage, ignorant of these events. His life was that of a contented recluse; his companions being the hermit and a pair of parrots, which the latter had tamed. No care vexed him till one night when he overheard the male parrot talking thus to his mate:—"A princess, Rupamoti by name, is in want of a lover. But she has vowed to give her hand to none but to him who shall bring her Gajamutty, the pearls that grow in the heads of elephants." The female parrot asked where they could be found, and her mate said in reply, "There is in a certain place a mountain, with its summit perpetually covered with snow; and there is the sea of cream, in so much repute among men, washing its base. The unrivalled beams of *Gajamutty* fall upon the cream, and the aspirant for the girl's favour must make himself master of these pearls." Basanta, fired by curiosity and a passion for Rupamoti, whom he had never seen and of whom he had just now heard for the first time, went to the parrots, and said that he would get the pearls. The birds lauded his courage, and instructed him to undertake the expedition dressed in the princely robes to be found at the top of the Shimul[1] tree standing near, and with the hermit's sacred trident in his hand. He got the robes down from the tree, and the trident from his spiritual teacher, and set out in search of the snow-clad mountain. Great were the obstacles that he met by the way, and the impediments that he had to surmount in reaching his destination, which he finally did in twelve years and thirteen days. His robe and the trident had a magical power which enabled him to reach the top of the mountain. From the summit he looked out over the sea of

[1] A big thorny tree, with very red but scentless flowers.

cream, and among the lotuses of gold floating on its surface he found a milk-white elephant, out of the head of which there peeped a string of pearls, bright like diamonds. He jumped up on to the elephant's back, greedily seized the pearls, and put them in the pocket of his robe. But what was his wonder to find the sea dried up and the lotuses gone, except one of gold into which the elephant had been transformed, and which said to him, "Take me and the pearls to Rupamoti and she will then pass her life happily with her husband." Having finished his work, Basanta was about to retrace his steps when he heard voices saying, "O brother, take us with you." The voices came from under the sands on the seashore, and digging under these, he found three fishes of gold. He took them up and went on, a dazzling light enveloping him. At the end of his long journey homewards he found out the kingdom of Rupamoti's father, and inquiring after her, was told that she was a prisoner in the palace of the great king, Sheet. He went there, and sending the king the three gold fishes as presents, asked that Rupamoti might be set at liberty. But neither the presents nor the request reached the king, for some days previously, having suddenly recalled to his memory the picture of his brother and the forlorn condition in which he had left him, he had been so grieved that he had shut himself up for days and nights within his private apartments, denying himself every nourishment and the company of those he loved. Basanta was informed of this, and he waited in the palace, expecting to see the king when he should be restored to his usual state of mind. On the eighth day after Basanta's arrival the king recovered from the first shock of his grief, and in the course of the preparations that were being made for a sumptuous repast for him, the three fishes which, though of gold, were eatable, were about to be cut in pieces. But they cried out saying, "Do not kill us, we are the king's brothers." The maidservant who had charge of the fishes ran up to her master and reported to him what had happened. He ordered

them as well as the person who had presented them to be brought before him. But he was too excited to wait for their arrival. And he forthwith hurried out in search of him. Mutual recognition followed, and the two brothers shed tears of joy. The elder apologized to the younger for having neglected him; the younger forgave him and asked him to drive the past out of his mind. They were thus employed when the three gold fishes, being suddenly transformed into as many princes, rushed in, bowed down to them and introduced themselves as the sons of the Suo queen, who had been the cause of their troubles. Sheet and Basanta embraced them, and asked after the welfare of their parents. The sad story was soon told, and the five brothers together entered the inner apartments of the palace.

In the meantime the golden parrot that had accompanied Rupamoti beckoned to her and said, "The son of an unhappy mother, after crossing seven seas, has brought Gajamutty for you." The princess was surprised to hear this, but a servant ran in and confirmed the news that King Sheet's brother had actually brought the pearls. Rupamoti was delighted, and to reward the parrot for the information it had been the first to give, had preparations made to give it a bath in milk and rosewater. With her own hands she poured the mixture on the bird's head, and, the charm being washed away, it was changed into a lady of ravishing beauty, who was Sheet and Basanta's mother. She narrated her sad history to the princess, and told her that it was her younger son who had brought the pearls.

Information of this wonderful metamorphosis was given to the five brothers, who hastened to do homage to the once unfortunate queen. Rupamoti met them there, and offered her hand to Basanta, who gladly accepted it. The nuptials were celebrated in the fittest style, and men were sent to find out Sheet and Basanta's father, and bring him to them. The search was successful, and the dethroned king came to his

sons and embraced them. With Sheet's help he got back his kingdom, which he united with his son's; and the royal family, consisting of the old king, the queen, their sons and daughters-in-law, passed their days in unalloyed happiness.

IV

KIRUNMALA, OR THE WREATH OF LIGHT

THERE was once a certain king who, being anxious to learn how his subjects fared, used to disguise himself and go amongst them by night. On one occasion he reached a cottage, and, from outside, overheard the conversation going on within. He recognized three distinct voices, and gathered that they belonged to three young girls who were discussing the subject of matrimony. "What a splendid thing it would be," said one of them, "if I could get married to the feeder of the king's horses. I should then daily feast on fried grain." Another preferred the king's cook, for the reason that if she married him she would be sure of being served with the best dishes in the palace. The third girl, after much hesitation, said that if fortune favoured her she would marry the king himself.

Next day the king sent palanquins to fetch into the palace the three girls, who were sisters. He asked them what they had been talking of the night before, and on their hesitating to answer, said that he had overheard their conversation, and that their desires should be fulfilled. After this, on an auspicious day, the sisters were married according to their choice.

After some time the youngest sister, who had become queen, was about to become a mother, and a room was furnished with great splendour for her confinement. The time of her delivery drawing near, she expressed a wish to be nursed, not by strangers, but by her sisters. They were at once sent for and told what was required of them, and they consequently remained in the palace with the queen. But,

unfortunately, they were not happy. Envy at the splendour by which their sister was surrounded gnawed at their hearts, and they watched for an opportunity to injure her. That opportunity soon came when the queen, knowing that her hour drew near, resorted to the room that had been prepared for her and gave birth to a son; and the cruel way in which they used it, was to put the child into a covered earthen pot, throw it into an adjoining river, and substitute a new-born cur in its place, while the mother lay almost insensible through weakness. When the king came to inquire whether his wife had brought forth a son or a daughter, they showed him the cur as his issue.

After this, in two successive years, the queen brought forth two children, a son and a daughter; and her sisters who, as before, attended on her, disposed of them in the same way as the first child, substituting for them a kitten and a doll of wood. The alleged fruit of the queen's labour, in each case, was made known to the king, who thereupon thought her to be an evil woman whose very touch was contaminating, and he banished her from the kingdom sitting astride a donkey with her face towards the tail, and with *ghoul*, a mixture of water and curd, poured over her head.[1]

In the meantime the earthen pots containing the king's children had floated to the bank of the river into which they had been cast, and attracted the attention of a Brahmin performing his devotions there. He took them home, and removing their coverings found therein two prince-like boys and a girl possessing the beauty of a goddess. Being himself childless, he brought these up as his own children. He had been in comfortable circumstances before, but his means increased very greatly on his bringing the children into his house. He named the two boys *Arun* (the sun) and *Barun* (Neptune, or the water-god), and the girl *Kirunmala;* and with them he passed his days very happily, devoting his leisure hours to the instruction, both secular and religious, of

[1] This was the punishment inflicted on the worst and most degraded criminals.

Arun and Barun. His wife, too, taught Kirunmala all the domestic duties of a woman. Time passed smoothly with them for several years, till one day the Brahmin, finding himself growing decrepit and infirm, called his adopted sons and daughter to him and said, "My beloved children, I am on my way to another kingdom, the kingdom of *Yama*.[1] Live virtuously and peacefully, and prosperity will be your reward." The Brahmin then passed through the portals of death, deeply mourned by Arun, Barun and Kirunmala.

Let us now take a view of what was happening in the palace of their real father. After the queen had been banished he was visited by many calamities. So great were his troubles that he began to feel that he himself and his kingdom were under a curse. Life itself became wearisome, and to divert himself he led one day a hunting expedition into the forest. The day passed in the excitement of the chase; but at night, the sky was covered with black rumbling clouds, and a great storm soon raged furiously, the windows of the heavens were opened, and the rain came down in torrents. The king was separated from his men and took shelter in the hollow of a tree. When the terrible night came to an end at last, the sky cleared, and the king, worn out with hunger and thirst, sought for some human habitation. After a time he succeeded in the search, and coming to the house occupied by Arun, Barun and Kirunmala he called in plaintive tones for water. They responded at once to his call, and attended to his wants. When sufficiently refreshed, he commenced conversation with them, in the course of which they learnt that he was the king of their country; and after a little while he left them, pouring blessings on their heads.

The mention of the word "king" roused a series of thoughts in Kirunmala's mind. She asked her brothers what the insignia of a king were, and learning that a grand palace was one of these, she urged them to build one. They loved their sister too dearly not to comply with her wishes, and com-

[1] The Greek Pluto, or the god of the regions of death in the Hindu mythology.

mencing the building, they completed it in thirteen months and six days. Its high tower reached almost to the skies. Built of white marble, and with silver doors and windows, and turrets of gold, it put even *Bishwakarma*[1] to shame. A religious mendicant, or *fakir*, one day passing by the newly built mansion and learning whose it was, saw the owners, and spoke to them thus :—

"You have built an unrivalled palace, it is true; but there is something wanting to complete its beauty and grandeur. You must plant here a silver tree with flowers of gold, and a tree of diamonds with birds of gold perched on it. And above these trees there must be a canopy of a net made of pearls."

The brothers and their sister, much surprised, wanted to know where these strange things were to be found, and the fakir said, "There is an enchanted mountain in the north, at the top of which you will find them."

On hearing this, Arun started in search of the mountain, leaving a sword with his brother and sister, and saying that if ever they found it rusty they might conclude that he was dead. Time passed, until at length one day Barun was startled to find the sword rusty. He communicated this to Kirunmala, and after the usual period of mourning he set out for the mountain, leaving a bow and an arrow with his sister, and telling her that if either of these suddenly broke it would be a certain indication of his death.

After the most arduous journey imaginable, Barun reached the mountain, and hearing some one behind him call him by name, he faced round, and was immediately turned into a statue of marble. He then perceived that his brother had met with the same fate.

Kirunmala was one day apprised of her younger brother's fate by the sudden breaking of the bow and arrow; but instead of giving way to fruitless grief, she attired herself as a man, and started in quest of the enchanted mountain. Passing

[1] The great and matchless architect in Hindu mythology, who made the palaces of the gods.

over many hills and through many jungles, and braving the inclemencies of the elements, she began her ascent of the mountain on the thirty-third day of her journey. On seeing her, demons and ghosts, tigers, bears, and elephants, fierce snakes and other venomous reptiles all closed round her and threatened to devour her. She was addressed from behind as "Rajputra," but she neither turned her head back nor replied. Treated with contempt by her, her enemies disappeared, and she reached the place where the tree of silver with flowers of gold, and the tree of diamonds with birds of gold perched on it, stood. She saw also the net of pearls hanging over the trees. The birds of gold hailed her, and pointing out a clear spring told her to sprinkle some of its water on the two marble statues standing near by. She did as directed, and the statues were transformed into two human beings whom she instantly recognized as her brothers. They were naturally transported at this happy meeting. The brothers had been brought back to life, and the mountain had yielded its wonderful possessions. The brothers sped home with their sister, and their palace was soon adorned with Kirunmala's beautiful acquisitions.

Passers-by were dumbfounded at the sight of that rich mansion, fit for the reception of the gods. The king, being informed of its existence, hastened to the spot, and saw that it stood on the site of the house that had belonged to the youths by whom he had been entertained on a previous occasion. On inquiry, he found that those very persons were the owners of the mansion. Delighted at the visit of so great a personage, they invited him to spend the day with them and partake of the humble dinner that they were able to provide. He accepted the invitation, and arrangements were made to entertain him to the best of their power. In the meantime, one of the birds of gold that Kirun had brought asked her to place it in the dining-hall near the king, and she complied with its request.

At the hour appointed dinner was brought in, and plates

groaning under viands of the richest and most delicious kind were placed before the king. But, when he was about to eat, some articles of food were turned into gold mohurs and the others into gems. Greatly surprised, he said, "Arun, Barun, and Kirunmala, what have I done to be the subject of such a hoax? Is it possible for a man to eat gold mohurs and gems?" The persons addressed also were surprised at what had happened, and unable to read the mystery they kept silent; whereupon the bird from its cage said, "O king, you say it is impossible for a human being to eat gold mohurs and gems; is it not equally impossible for a woman to give birth to a cur, a kitten, and a doll? Here are Arun, Barun, and Kirunmala, your sons and daughter. If you care to receive your wronged and disgraced wife back, look for her in the hut across the neighbouring river." The king, in sincere repentance, rolled on the ground, cursing his stupidity in being imposed upon by his sisters-in-law; and, when somewhat tranquillized, he embraced his children and begged them to go to their mother, whom he was ashamed to meet. Greatly moved, they hastened to the hut where she lived, and brought her home. And within as short a time as possible their father removed his capital to the place where their palace was, and the royal couple passed their days in peace and happiness with their sons and daughter, who were soon afterwards married. The queen's sisters were sentenced to be buried alive, with thorns above and under them.

V

BLUE LOTUS AND RED LOTUS

A CERTAIN king had two wives, one of whom was a *Rakkhashi*[1] disguised. Each of them had a son, that of the Rakkhashi being named *Ajit*, or the Unconquerable, and the other *Kushum*, or the Flower-like. The two boys were very fond of each other: they ate, learnt their lessons, and slept together. The Rakkhashi, however, was ever on the alert to feed on her rival and her son; and one day she actually devoured the former. But she could not get the latter into her clutches, inasmuch as he was under the protection of his half-brother. At length she invited some of her fellow creatures into the kingdom, intending to do by force what she had not been able to do by stratagem. One night one of her Rakkhashis burst into the room where the king, with his sons, was asleep, seized Kushum, and ate him up. The king was paralyzed with fear, and stood helpless while Ajit gave the giant a blow, and compelled him to flee from the room. Before doing so, however, he threw out of his mouth a ball of gold.

The Rakkhashi was so frantic with rage that she herself attacked her son and ate him up. But as soon as she had done so, a ball of iron came out of her mouth and rolled on the ground. After this she went to the top of the palace, and calling a conclave of the Rakkhashis, dismissed them to their country. But the gold and iron balls gave her no peace.

[1] In Hindu mythology the Rakkhush and Rakkhashi were demons, male and female, gigantic and terrible in shape. They were said to be possessed of supernatural powers.

She smelt danger in them, and one night she buried them under a clump of bamboos a little way off from the palace.

One day a labourer came to the place and cut off two bamboos, and great was his surprise to find an egg in each of them, one red and the other blue. Fearing that they were the eggs of a snake, he hurriedly left the spot, and when he had gone, out of the blue egg came Kushum, and out of the red Ajit. The two brothers, leaving their father's kingdom behind, set out for the dominions of another king. His kingdom was infested by *Khokkoshes*,[1] who devoured his subjects in hundreds. One night he dreamt that he was to be freed from the hands of the marauders by two princes, whom he should reward by giving to them his two daughters in marriage with the half of his kingdom. His dream was soon fulfilled. Kushum and Ajit, now named Neelkamal (blue lotus), and Lalkamal (red lotus), after the colours of the eggs out of which they had come, presented themselves before him, and on his telling them his dream, they at once volunteered to kill the Khokkoshes. Their plan was to await the giants in a room which they haunted at night, and accordingly they took their places there at nine o'clock. For a long time, however, there was no sign of them, and it was not until it struck twelve that they came to the door of the room, which was shut, and demanded to know who was inside. Neelkamal was awake at the moment, and Lalkamal asleep. The latter had, however, before retiring, told the former that if the Khokkoshes came during his vigil, he must not say that it was he alone that was watching, but that he had his brother awake with him. True to his promise Neelkamal, when challenged, said, "Force your way in, and you will find Lalkamal and Neelkamal with their swords ready to receive you." The name of Lalkamal produced terror in the Khokkoshes, because they knew that the blood of a Rakkhashi flowed in his veins, and they withdrew a few paces. But to verify what they had been told, the head Khokkosh said in a

[1] A tribe of monsters akin to the Rakkhushes, but more ferocious than they.

nasal, though loud voice, "If Lalkamal be inside, let him show me the tip of his nose through the chink in the door." Neelkamal at once thrust out the point of a sharp knife to represent Lalkamal's nose, and the giants were terrified. "One having such a nose," they said, "is too dangerous a being to approach." Then they wanted to see the spittle Lalkamal threw, and on this Neelkamal cast at them the *ghee* that was burning in the lamp before him, which produced blisters on their bodies. Though the pain was very great the Khokkoshes did not run away. They asked to have a sight of Lalkamal's tongue, and through the chink a sharp sword was thrust out. They laid hold of it, and all in a body commenced pulling at it. The fingers of their leader, however, were so badly cut that he ran away. But coming back within a short time he went near the door of the room, and again asked who was inside. A drowsiness had come upon Neelkamal, and unconsciously he said that it was he alone that was watching. At the mention of his name, and the omission of his brother's, the monsters in a body rushed into the room, and were about to tear him to pieces, when Lalkamal awoke and despatched them with gigantic strokes of his sword.

The next morning the people of the city were surprised to find a large heap of dead Khokkoshes. The king, hearing this, sent for the princes and gave them the promised rewards.

The Rakkhashi queen, being informed of the massacre of the Khokkoshes, and having by magic ascertained the whereabouts of her son and stepson, sent emissaries to bring about their destruction. She sent two of her attendants, who also were Rakkhashis in disguise, with the false message that their father was dying of an incurable disease, and that his life could be saved only by rubbing his body with a Rakkhashi's brain. The brothers, anxious to prolong the life of their father, at once started for the land of the Rakkhashis. After a very long journey they one evening reached a banyan tree, and rested at its foot. Overhead they heard two birds, called

Bangoma and *Bangami*, talking to each other in human language.

Bangami said, "The blindness of our young ones is a great calamity; but now is the time when their eyes should be opened. One of the men there, named Lalkamal, has the power of restoring sight to them by his mere touch. The men are on a very perilous journey, and we must help them as much as we can." At dawn Bangami flew down to the princes with her offspring, and Lalkamal touched them and they were healed. Then their mother said, "Oh, princes, we know you and your mission. Take these fried peas in your pockets, and mount on the backs of my young ones, who will carry you to your destination and back to your own country. The peas you will put into your mouth on the sly, when required by the giants whom you are going to visit to chew iron pellets as the proof of your being the sons of the Rakkhashi who passes as your father's queen."

The princes were then borne away to the country of the Rakkhashis, a number of whom quickly flocked around them, crying out :—

"Whoung, moung, khoung[1]
Monisshee gondo paung.
Dhoreh, Dhoreh khaung."

This, of course, was said at the sight of Neelkamal, whom they recognized as a man. Lalkamal, knowing that his brother was in danger, stepped forth and said, "Grandmother, we are your grandsons come to visit you." At this the old Rakkhashi whom they addressed said, "If that is so let me test you. Cut these iron pellets with your teeth, and then I shall acknowledge your claims to kinship." So saying, she put the pellets into the hands of the brothers, who dexterously substituting for them the fried peas they had brought, chewed them up. Thus not only were they freed from danger, but

[1] These are the words that Rakkhashis are supposed to use when a human prey is near them, meaning, "Hurrah, we scent human flesh, and we will eat it."

were also made much of. Yet still the smell of human flesh bewildered the Rakkhashis. They passed it over, however, and the time went by in friendly entertainment. One day when their hosts had gone out in search of food, Lalkamal with his brother went to a well at the back of the house, dived under it, and brought up with him a casket containing two hornets, in one of which the lives of all the Rakkhashis were lodged. The other had in it the life of the Rakkhashi who was Lalkamal's mother. When each of the brothers took out a hornet, the giants, who had gone out, felt themselves uneasy and hastened home; and the Rakkhashis in the palace felt a very painful palpitation of their hearts. The legs of one of the hornets were torn off, and the Rakkhushes and Rakkhashis at the same time lost their limbs. Rolling on the ground, they approached the princes with mouths wide open to devour them; but on the head of the hornet being removed, they fell down lifeless. Lalkamal cut off the head of his grandmother, rolled it in a napkin, and called on the young Bangomas to carry him and his brother away. After three months they reached their father's kingdom, and wanted to deliver the head they brought to the messengers from their father's palace. But these were not to be found, for they too had died at the same time as their relations and friends. The head therefore was sent through a sepoy in the entourage of the brothers. On seeing it, Lalkamal's mother was so excited and enraged that she cast off her disguise, assumed her gigantic form, and cried out:—

"Thanda khang, gorom khang[1]
Mor moria haddi khang
Dau, dau chitar agun
Taholei booker jala jaung."

Thereupon she hurried out to where Neelkamal and

[1] The four lines mean:—"I will eat all things, warm or cold: I will eat bones which will make a cracking sound inside my mouth. There is something like the fire of a funeral pyre burning within my bosom; and if I can do what I wish, my heart-burn will cease."

Lalkamal sat together, and the latter, being apprehensive of injury, took out the remaining hornet and killed it, and the Rakkhashi immediately fell down dead.

On being freed from this pest Neelkamal and Lalkamal's father regained his health and energies, and learning where his sons were, sent for them. They came, and their own kingdom and that of their father-in-law, who had recently died, was annexed to their father's, and once more in their paternal house, they lived happily with their wives and children, much to the delight of the old king.

VI

DALIMKUMAR

ONCE there was a king who was blessed with a queen of surpassing beauty and virtue, and a son named Dalimkumar who was gifted with all princely qualities. The life of the queen was enclosed in a set of dice, and the fact was known by a *Rakkhashi* who lived in a palmyra tree close by. She was always on the alert to secure the dice and kill the queen.

At length an opportunity came. The king had gone out one day on a hunting expedition, leaving the prince at a game of dice with his friends. The Rakkhashi came where the game was going on, in the disguise of a mendicant, and asked the prince to give her the dice. Her request was granted, and by an incantation which she uttered, the dice were carried to a kingdom beyond the realm of *Yama*,[1] where reigned her sister *Pashabutty* (one skilled at dice). The queen fell senseless in her room; and the Rakkhashi, entering it, killed her and assumed her form. Nobody became aware of the trick that had been played, and the Rakkhashi therefore was enabled successfully to impersonate her, after having put her corpse in an unfrequented room.

In course of time the Rakkhashi gave birth to seven sons who bore no mark of their origin in their appearance, but were very handsome youths. Gradually they grew up into young men, and one day asked permission of their father to go out and see the world. He gave them the required permission on condition that they should take their eldest brother,

[1] The Hindu god of death.

Dalimkumar, with them as their guardian and guide. On the auspicious day the eight brothers started on their journey on eight winged horses. The Rakkhashi, finding that Dalimkumar was no longer in her power, opened a casket out of which a snake, thin as a thread and named *Shutashankha*, made its appearance. She asked it where the life of her stepson was hid, and was shown a few pomegranate stones that contained it. She took the stones and shut them up in a cellar below the great staircase of the palace. She then gave the following instructions to the snake :—

"O Shutashankha, ride on the air with this letter to my sister Pashabutty. I want her to have ready seven girls of transcendent beauty for my seven sons. On your way kill Dalimkumar, and thus remove him from my path."

Having dismissed the snake on its errand, she uttered a Mantra (incantation), by the power of which the winged horses carrying her sons should reach Pashabutty's kingdom.

Shutashankha soon overtook the princes that same evening, and succeeded in stinging Dalimkumar in the eyes so that he instantly fell down from his horse stone-blind. His brothers, who were a few yards in advance, were ignorant of his fate, and so continued to ride on. The snake, however, was well punished by fate. Having reached a certain king's orchard, it managed to get into a fruit and hide itself, coiling within it to pass the night in safety. Early the next morning, before the snake awoke, the gardener gathered the fruit to be eaten by the king's daughter. She ate the fruit, and along with it the snake, with the Rakkhashi's letter inside it.

Dalimkumar's brothers that same morning, not finding him and quite ignorant of his mishap, thought that he had outstripped them ; and so they rode on expecting to overtake him. Having travelled a considerable distance, and not finding him, they wanted to make a careful search for him. But they could not lessen the speed of their horses, which having been charmed by the Rakkhashi, ran on till they reached Pashabutty's house. The seven princes were

well received; and the best apartments were assigned to them.

It had been a long-standing custom with Pashabutty to challenge every rich stranger who came to her to a game at dice, on condition that if he won, she and her seven sisters should surrender their charms to him; but if he lost the game he must forfeit his life. The challenge was given to the new guests, of whose birth and near connection with her Pashabutty was quite ignorant; for the letter sent by her sister had miscarried. They accepted the challenge, lost the game, and with it their lives. Pashabutty and her seven sisters feasted upon them.

The forest in which Dalimkumar had fallen from his horse was situated on the borders of a kingdom ruled by a young queen of extraordinary beauty, who seemed doomed by fate to widowhood. Unfettered by any law prohibiting the remarriage of widows in her kingdom, she had married several young men worthy of her, one after another, each one of whom had mysteriously died during the night following the day of marriage. The last of these had died on the very night that Dalim had been struck blind; and so while the next morning he was lying helpless, the royal elephant in quest of a new husband for its queen took him up on its back and entered the palace with him, in the midst of great rejoicings. The prince was at once introduced to the queen, who with joy accepted him as her lord. After spending a part of the night in delightful conversation, the royal couple retired to rest. The night advanced, and the whole city was wrapped in silence. But Dalimkumar, who had been informed of the fate of his predecessors, sat up with lights near him. Suddenly he heard unusual sounds in the room. The walls began to shake and crack in every direction. The prince was struck with terror, but he was not unmanned. Though blind, he found his sword, and grasping it in his hand, he stood firm to meet the impending danger. In the meantime, something like a thread cut through the nostrils of the queen which

gradually assumed the form of a big snake, and went about the room hissing. Attracted by the sound, the king approached where it was with its hood erect, and carefully aimed such a blow that he at once severed its head from its body. This was the snake Shutashankha, Dalimkumar's inveterate enemy, and the queen, when a girl in her father's house, had given it admission into her body through the fruit which she had one day eaten there, and in which it had remained asleep.

The snake being killed, Dalimkumar's sight was restored; and when he showed himself alive the next morning the whole city was filled with shouts of joy. When the dead snake was being burnt, out came the Rakkhashi's letter, and on reading it, Dalim came to know who the wretched woman impersonating his mother was, and what had been the nature of the plot against him. He learnt, too, the whereabouts of his half-brothers; and, after the honeymoon, he started for Pashabutty's kingdom. On reaching it he was challenged to a game at dice, under the usual conditions. He accepted the challenge, and while playing, detected that a small mouse crept out of the lap of his rival, got under the dice, and turned them in favour of its mistress. On some plausible pretext, he got up from the gaming table, promising to take up the game the next day. He kept his promise, and having secured a kitten, hid it under his dress. The mouse did not venture to creep out, and he won the game. Finding Pashabutty and her sisters at his mercy according to the conditions under which the game had been played, he cast a scornful look upon them, and held before them the letter which their sister, from his father's palace, had written to them, but which had by a lucky coincidence fallen into his hands. He recognized the dice to be the same as those he had once parted with. The sisters were greatly dismayed, and shrank into the forms of creeping worms. The charm hanging over their house was dispelled, and the seven princes and their horses started into view, as if disgorged by the earth. Dalim's horse, too, which had been turned into stone at the

time he was struck blind, suddenly appeared in its natural condition; and the eight brothers set out on their way to their father's kingdom. The real queen, who had so long lain dead, had returned to consciousness on the recovery of the dice in which her life was held. She came out of the room in which she had been shut up, and the princes on their arrival bowed down at her feet and received her blessing. The old king's joy was boundless; and having heard of Dalim's adventures, he sent for his daughter-in-law from her distant kingdom, asking her to remove her court to his, so that two kingdoms might merge into one. She agreed, and nothing was wanting to complete to the fullest measure the happiness of the royal family.

The Rakkhashi was never more heard of. Her favourite haunt, the palmyra, was shortly afterwards found to have suddenly withered and died.

VII

A STICK OF GOLD AND A STICK OF SILVER

IN a certain country, the king's son, the prime minister's son, the chief merchant's son and the highest police officer's son were very intimate friends. They passed most of their time together in merry conversation and sport, without any pursuits befitting their position. Their fathers were very much dissatisfied with them, and resolved to treat them in such a way that they should, in disgust, be forced to do something that might retrieve their position in their respective families. So their mothers were instructed by their husbands one day to put ashes on their dinner plates instead of food, that being the highest indignity that could be offered. The prime minister's wife, and the wives of the merchant and the police superintendent, did as they were bidden, but the queen, unable to be so cruel to her son, served him with all the usual delicacies, putting only a pinch-full of ashes on the plate, thereby partially obeying her husband. The prince noticed the ashes, and asked his mother to account for them. She made some excuse, which, however, did not satisfy his curiosity. Having satisfied his hunger he went out and met his friends, whom he asked how they had fared that day; and they, with tears in their eyes, told him that only ashes had been given them for food. He informed them of what his mother had done; and keenly feeling the insult, the four young men left the kingdom to try their fortunes in the world without.

After many days they at length reached the borders of an extensive forest. Here were four roads, leading in four

different directions, and each of them chose a road for himself, leaving marks whereby they might recognize the spot in future, agreeing to meet there again later. Each sped on his way and spent the whole day trying to find some human habitation. But their search was in vain, and in the evening they returned to the resting-place The king's son said that from certain signs he suspected that a spell had been cast on them by Rakkhashis; and that they must be on their guard during the night. He also said that as the pangs of hunger were almost unbearable they must in the meantime go and try to secure some fruit from the forest. But no fruit was to be found. They were not, however, altogether disappointed. A deer's head was discovered by one of them, and with this they hastened back to their resort, eager to make a meal of it. To dress it up the prince's friends went to fetch fuel, fire, and water, leaving him asleep. The police superintendent's son, returning with the fuel, touched the deer's head with his sword to cut it; when lo! a Rakkhashi leapt out of it, ate up him and his horse and again entered into the deer's head. The merchant's son and the son of the minister came back, one after the other, and met their friend's fate. The minister's son, when about to be devoured, called out in anguish, "Prince, save me," and on this the latter awoke, and rushed to meet the enemy with drawn sword. But his winged horse, now in the Rakkhashi's clutches, called to him, saying, "O prince, run away, or there is no chance for you." The rocks and the trees standing near by repeated the cry, and he ran blindly forward, pursued, however, by the giantess, till at last, quite exhausted and breathless, he reached a mango tree, which he thus addressed:—"O blessed tree, do thou who hast been here since the golden age give me protection." Suddenly it was cleft; and the fugitive found refuge within it. The Rakkhashi prayed to the tree not to rob her of her prey, but the prayer was not heeded. She then transformed herself into a girl of great beauty, and remained seated at the foot of the tree, crying aloud as if some dire calamity had befallen

her. The king of the place, who had been out on a hunting expedition, came to where she was; and ravished with her charms, took her home, and married her. But she had not forgotten her grudge against the prince who had escaped her jaws; and she devised a plan to destroy him. She pretended to be very ill, and laid herself down on a bed, under which she spread some dried flax plants. They crackled, and she said that the noise proceeded from her bones that were broken. Her husband was duped, and in great anxiety he called in the royal physician, whom she bribed to tell the king that the only remedy in this difficult and unheard-of case was that she might be made to inhale the smoke caused by burning the planks to be had from that particular mango tree at the foot of which she had been found. The king sent men to cut down the tree, and the prince, who was still within it, to save himself from impending peril asked it to change him into one of its fruit, and cast him into the adjacent tank, with instructions to a *boal*[1] fish in it to give him a place in its belly. His wishes were complied with.

The planks were in due time burnt in the Rakkhashi's room, but finding no blood marks on them, she knew that the subject of her malice had escaped her, and, by the exercise of her superhuman powers, learnt that he was in the shape of a mango, safe inside a boal fish in the tank near the destroyed mango tree. She communicated this to the physician who was in her pay, and induced him to get the permission of the king to fetch the fish, alleging that the inhalation of the smoke of the planks had done her no good. The permission was asked and granted, and the fish brought into the palace, but no mango was found on cutting it open, for the prince had persuaded his protector, the boal, to transform him into a snail. The king then became quite hopeless of the recovery of his beloved wife.

Meanwhile the prince, who had been changed into a snail,

[1] The Boal is a fish, large in size, with a head very much resembling that of the shark.

was lying in the tank. A girl came to bathe in the tank, and touching the snail with her foot she brought it out of the water and broke it, and out of it the prince issued forth, enchanting her with his ravishing personal charms. The girl took him home, where he remained as her friend.

The Rakkhashi quickly divined all this, and invented a fresh scheme to bring about his destruction. She told her husband that she might recover on touching certain things that were to be found in her father's kingdom, the things being *Hasan Champa* (Champa flowers), a particular spindle called *Natan kati*, and a raw melon twelve cubits long with its stone thirteen cubits in length. She also said that the only person who could fetch them was a prince, hiding himself in a house not far away. The king at once ordered his men to find out the prince, and bring him to the palace. They fulfilled their mission, and he was instantly bidden to start after the things, even though he gave out the antecedents of her who was then the queen. He began his journey only under compulsion.

Days and months passed away, and at last the prince reached a splendid mansion. He entered, but there was no one to be seen. Finding a grand staircase in one of the apartments, he ascended it and entered the first room that he came to. Here he was surprised to find a girl of rare beauty fast asleep. He tried to rouse her, but in vain. At length he saw two sticks lying by her, one of gold and the other of silver. He had heard before of the wonderful properties of such things, and taking up the stick of gold he touched the damsel with it, and she awoke, and asked him if he were a god, for who but a god could come into a house infested by Rakkhashis. The prince told her who he was, and on what mission he had come, and expressed a desire to learn more of her. On this, the girl related her history, saying that she was the daughter of a king, to whom the house she lived in had belonged. A body of Rakkhushes and Rakkhashis had invaded his kingdom and devoured him with his queen and all his subjects, his horses

and his elephants. She was the only one spared. Some of the giants and giantesses were specially fond of her. But she was not allowed the least liberty. When they went out to secure food they left her as if dead by touching her with the silver stick, and on their return they revived her by the touch of the stick of gold.

While she was thus talking they heard the Rakkhushes and Rakkhashis returning, and bawling out :—

"Hung, maung, khaun!"
(We smell human flesh, and must eat it.)

The princess in a panic asked the prince to put her to sleep with the help of the silver stick, and to hide himself in the next room, which was used for worship, under the heap of flowers and Bael leaves that he would find there.

An old Rakkhashi came where the princess was lying, and rousing her with the gold stick, said—

"Grandchild, how is it that I smell a human being here?"

The princess replied :

"It may be it is I whom you smell, satisfy yourself by eating me up."

The Rakkhashi said, "Nonsense, thou, the apple of my eye, must not say so. Thou art my life; see what good things I have brought thee." Saying this, she gave the girl an ample meal, and retired for the night with the others to the sleeping chambers.

The next day dawned, and again they went out in a body, leaving the girl in a death-like sleep. The prince got out of his hiding place and roused her to consciousness. They then consulted togther as to the best means of escape from their terrible situation. The prince suggested that it would be best to worm out of the giantess, the girl's so-called grandmother, the secret of her existence and that of her people, since if that were known, it would be an easy task to get rid of them. The princess approved of the suggestion, and when in the night the Rakkhushes and Rakkhashis had sought their

couches, and the despicable being who called her "grand-daughter" was shampooing as usual, she contrived to put a few drops of oil into her eyes, so that her tears fell on the Rakkhashi's feet.

At this she started, and asked the princess why she wept. The girl said, "O Grandmother, you all love me dearly; but if while you are away some accident cause your death, what will become of me?" At this the giantess laughed and said, "Foolish girl, drive away these gloomy thoughts. None of us will die, save at the hands of him alone who will, in one breath, reach the white column of crystal under yonder tank, take out the large snake hid in it, and placing the animal on his breast, despatch it with one stroke of his sword. But for every drop of the snake's blood that may fall to the ground, there will start into existence seven thousand beings like us." The princess seemed very much delighted at what she heard, and said, "Tell me also, dear grandmother, in what the life of that one of you who is now, in human shape, the queen in one of the kingdoms far off (here she must have mentioned the name of the kingdom) is contained, and where can one get Hassan Champa, the spindle named Natan kati, and the raw melon, twelve cubits in length, with its stone longer by one cubit." The Rakkhashi replied, "The things you have named are in the room which your father occupied, and the life of my daughter, the queen you have mentioned, is hid in the parrot there."

The next morning the princess, on being roused by the touch of the stick of gold, communicated to the prince the information she had obtained; and when the latter was going through the feats required for the extermination of the giants and giantesses, they hastened with shrieks towards the mansion, the girl's self-constituted grandmother being the foremost. She cried out, "Ainglo, mainglo, O grand-daughter, this is thy doing. I will devour thee before I die." But there was no time for her to take vengeance; the snake was put to the sword without a single drop of its blood falling to

the ground, and the heads of the Rakkhushes and Rakkhashis fell at the same moment from off their bodies. The prince and the princess then left the place with the things that the former had come in search of, together with the parrot in which the life of the Rakkhashi in the palace was hid, and reached the kingdom whence the prince had been deputed. He saw the king, and told him that the things required for the queen's recovery had been obtained; that a *Durbar* should be held, before which certain circumstances connected with them should be told in order to increase their power as remedies, and that they should then be handed over to the patient in the presence of all assembled. The Durbar was called, and the queen came. But what was her terror when she found the things and the parrot? It was clear to her that her whole race had been destroyed, and that her own life was hanging by a thread; and, to make the most of her superhuman powers, she assumed her natural form, and was about to devour them all, when the prince brought the parrot out of its cage and put his hand on its neck to twist it. The Rakkhashi, finding herself completely at his mercy, implored him to spare her life. Whereupon he demanded that his friends with their horses should be restored to him, and she forthwith ejected them from her mouth quite uninjured. No mercy, however, was shown her. The parrot was killed, and with it the giantess.

The king, in gratitude to the prince for saving him and his subjects from the hands of the Rakkhashi, offered his deliverer the greater part of his treasures, but the offer was modestly refused. The four friends, without delay, returned to their own country, and were gladly received back by their parents and friends. The princess who had been rescued from the *Rakkhushpuri* (the house of the Rakkhushes) was with great *éclat* married to the prince, and their wedded life was one of joy and happiness.

VIII

JACKAL, THE SCHOOLMASTER

THERE was once a clever *Sheal* (jackal) whose father had erected a *Deal* (wall). The son was no less clever than his father, and to show his cleverness he opened a school in the forest in which he lived. Grasshoppers, centipedes, woolly-bears, cockroaches, white beetles, frogs, crabs, and spiders were his pupils. An alligator, living in a marsh close by, was seized with the desire of putting his offspring, seven in number, into the school; so taking them one morning to the jackal, he informed him of his desire and left them with him as boarders, the master promising that it would take them only seven days to grow into giants of learning. The jackal's mouth watered at the prospect of devouring them, and he fed on one of them daily. Six days passed in this way, and the parent alligator, hoping that on the next day his young ones would return home great scholars, went to pay them a visit, instructing his spouse to prepare the most delicious dainties against their return. He reached the school and asked the master how his dear ones were, and what progress they had made. The jackal said, "Mr. Alligator, your lovely young ones are unusually intelligent. They have progressed very well, but I can't send them away to-morrow morning. There is yet something very valuable for them to learn, so please let them remain here till the morning of the day after." The stupid alligator could not say nay to this proposal, and returned home thanking the jackal. The seventh day dawned, and the cunning schoolmaster, making his meal of the last young alligator, decamped.

The next day the alligator came to the jackal's house and, finding it deserted, suspected the truth, and with sighs and tears thus soliloquized, "Wretch of a jackal, don't think you will be able to give me the slip. I know that you frequent the canal yonder, in search of crabs; and I will lie in ambush there, and will teach you what it is to offend against an alligator." Saying this, he went off direct to the canal, and hid himself under the water. The jackal guessed his intentions, but could not desist from visiting the canal, which contained the best crabs to be had. He proceeded cautiously, however, for a few days. But in course of time his fears vanished; and one day, seeing a number of well-grown crabs swimming in the water, he could not resist the temptation of jumping in. It was the moment for which the alligator had so long waited, and in the twinkling of an eye he caught the jackal by one of his legs and tried to drag him to the bank. There was a fierce struggle on both sides, and in the midst of it the jackal was drawn to a bed of reeds. He instantly broke one of them, and holding it forward under the water towards his assailant, said, "Mr. Alligator, I admire your sagacity. Instead of biting one of my legs you seized the stick I had in my hand. Now see here, both my legs are uninjured, and I put one of them forth, to convince you of your stupidity." The ruse succeeded, and the alligator, releasing the leg, seized the reed with his teeth, leaving his antagonist free to jump away, saying, "Good-bye, friend. I will again open a school. Send your future darlings there."

Days passed until one morning the alligator, having ascertained the new whereabouts of his enemy, went there to satisfy his long-standing grudge. He knew that he could not get the jackal into his clutches except by a stratagem, so he feigned death, with his mouth wide open and stomach distended. The jackal, approaching near, suspected the trick, and to see how long the alligator would have patience to remain in that state, he from a little distance threw stones into its mouth. But still the alligator did not move. Then

knowing that he was stupid enough to be easily taken in, the jackal said, "I see the alligator is not dead yet, for in that case his ears and tail would move."

The trick had the desired effect, and the alligator commenced moving his ears and tail; and the jackal sped away heartily laughing at its folly. There were some goat-herds near by, and at the sight of the alligator they exclaimed, "Ho, here is the alligator that despoiled us of some of our calves," and they chased him with their sticks until he saved himself by taking refuge in an adjacent river.

The jackal, in the meanwhile, resorted to a field of brinjals, and commenced eating them with great avidity. But fate soon deprived him of the treat. A thorn in the stem of a brinjal pierced him in the nose; and so great was the pain and the bleeding, that he was compelled to go to a barber[1] to have the thorn taken out. He stopped at the outer door of the barber's house; for it was not gentlemanly for him, though only a jackal, to enter the Zenana; and called aloud, "Mr. Barber, come out, I am in a fix, and have none but you to save me." The barber came out, and being told what the matter was, commenced the required operation; but unfortunately, instead of taking out the thorn he cut the patient's nose, whereupon the jackal cried out in a rage, "Rogue of a barber, I came to you for relief, and you have cut my nose; set it right, or I will punish you." Great was the poor barber's fear. He made a thousand apologies, but they were quite unheeded. At last, however, the jackal's anger being appeased a little, he let the offender off on receiving as a gift the iron instrument the barber used in paring nails. The cunning beast then went away, and happened to find a potter digging the ground for the mud required for his profession with his nails; for in the district in which he lived there was no blacksmith to make spades or shovels. The jackal pretended great sympathy, and offered the iron instrument with him to the potter, who taking it for trial, accidentally broke

[1] In times gone by, the barber was credited with great surgical skill.

it. The animal, in a rage, grinned at the potter, and was about to bite him. The poor man fell on his knees and asked for pardon, which was granted to him, though sullenly. But he had to part with a *harhi* (an earthen pot in which Indians cook their food) as satisfaction. The jackal then proceeded on his way with his new acquisition, and met a bridal procession, attended with the splendour usual on such occasions. There were fireworks, and one of the crackers hit and broke the harhi. The jackal grinned, and howled, and as his teeth were supposed to carry poison, the men in the procession were very glad to get rid of him by letting him have the bride, the surrender of whose person he demanded in exchange for the earthen pot. He determined to marry her, and went to a drummer's to engage musicians to play at his wedding. A priest also was required, and leaving his intended bride in the house, he hastened in search of one. She sat and dozed by the drummer's wife, who was cutting vegetables with a *Botie*[1] before her. The girl, nodding in slumber, accidentally fell on it and was cut into two pieces; and the drummer's wife, to hide the terrible mishap of which she was the innocent cause, removed the body to another room and hid it there. After a short time the jackal came back with the priest, but the girl was not to be found. The jackal was in a great rage, and peremptorily commanded the drummer's wife to produce her. The poor woman was beside herself with fear, and with clasped hands she confessed the truth, piteously praying for forgiveness. But tears and groanings went for nothing; and she was told that she would be let off only on parting with one of her husband's drums. Gladly she availed herself of this condition, and the jackal left the house. With the drum, he climbed up a palm tree and began to beat it to the accompaniment of the following song:—

[1] A sharp blade fixed to a thick piece of wood, two or three feet in length, with which the women of India cut fish and vegetables.

Ah, *doom dooma doom doom*
My nose was pierced by the thorn of a brinjal, *doom dooma doom doom*
I got a *Narun*[1] for the nose, *doom dooma doom doom*
With the *Narun* I got a *Harhi*, *doom dooma doom doom*
I got for the *Harhi* a bride, *doom dooma doom doom*
And for the bride, O hurrah, I have this drum, *doom dooma doom doom*
Dogoom dagoom, *doog dooga doom*
Doom dooma doom doom.

In a transport of delight he was thus singing and beating the drum when his foot slipped, and he fell into the canal flowing by. His old enemy the alligator, who had all this time been waiting for him, seized him by the throat and dived under the water. And thus his clever career came to its end.

[1] The iron instrument used to pare nails.

IX

HUMILITY REWARDED AND PRIDE PUNISHED

THERE was once a certain weaver with two wives, each of whom was blessed with a daughter. The names of the daughters were *Shookhu* and *Dukhu*. Shookhu with her mother, the elder wife, passed her time in idle amusements, while Dukhu and her mother did all the duties of the house. In course of time the weaver died, and his elder wife, appropriating to herself the property he left, Dukhu and her mother were obliged to shift for themselves. For their livelihood they spun cotton thread, and made coarse cloths of it, selling them in the bazar. One day Dukhu's mother went out, leaving some cotton to dry in the sun under the care of her daughter. A gust of wind suddenly dispersed the cotton on all sides, and the poor girl distractedly ran after the pieces flying in the air. Even the wind took pity on her and said, "Dukhu, don't cry, come after me." The girl did as she was told and eventually reached the door of a cowshed and was asked by its inmate to give her some food. Cows are regarded by Hindus as incarnations of their chief goddess (*Durga*), and Dukhu gladly did the service asked of her. She then resumed her journey after the wind, and on her way was requested by a plantain tree to relieve it of its overgrown boughs and the creepers round it. Again she did as she was desired, but no sooner had she followed the wind a little further than a horse wanted her to give it some food. She attended to it, and after a little while reached a

nicely whitewashed house which was very neat and clean inside, but situated in a very lonely place. There sat in the veranda of one of the rooms an old lady, all alone, who was making, in the twinkling of an eye, thousands and thousands of *Saris*.[1] The wind introduced her to Dukhu, saying that the old lady was the moon's mother, with the world's cotton at her disposal. The girl was tempted to ask for some, but was told that she must first refresh herself a little before receiving the gift. She was directed to go and bathe in a river close by, but no sooner had she dipped her head in it and drawn it up again than she was turned into a surpassingly beautiful damsel, adorned with the richest gems and ornaments of gold. On her return to the house, dishes of the choicest food were placed before her, but she did not touch them. She ate only a handful of stale rice, lying neglected in one of the corners of the room. The moon's mother then told her to go into an adjoining room where she would find an abundant stock of the best cotton in big closed chests, any one of which she might take. She did not take any of these, however, selecting a very small chest, lying apart, which she placed before her benefactress. The latter approved her choice and dismissed her, pouring blessings on her head.

On her way homewards she met her old acquaintances the horse, the plantain tree, and the cow, and they respectively presented her with a swift-winged colt, a begemmed necklace in a basketful of gold mohurs, and a calf belonging to that species which, whenever required, gives milk as sweet as nectar.

As soon as she reached home her mother, who had been restlessly awaiting her return, ran forward to embrace her. But what was the poor woman's surprise when she saw the treasures her daughter had brought. Dukhu told her bewildered mother the story of her adventures, and the latter, with a heart overflowing with joy, ran to Shookhu and her mother, recounting the good fortune that had visited Dukhu,

[1] The broad-bordered piece of cloth worn by a Bengali woman.

and proposing to give them a portion of the wealth the girl had brought. At this the weaver's elder widow, with a long face and eyes inflamed with anger, said, "Far be it from us to take a share of what we fear may have been dishonestly acquired. I would strike my daughter in the face with the broomstick should she take a cowrie[1] from the treasures you are so proud of. Avaunt! If fortune befriend my girl, she may to-morrow gain all the wealth the world contains."

The eventful day ended, and when Dukhu and her mother retired to their sleeping room at night the former opened the chest she had brought, and out of it came a prince-like youth, intended by fate to be her husband.

The next day Shookhu, who had managed to find out from her half-sister all the circumstances under which she had left home and obtained the immense fortune, set out on the same quest. But when following the wind she contemptuously refused to serve the cow, the plantain tree, and the horse, who all asked her help. She was not respectful even to the moon's mother when led before her. Haughtily addressing the venerable old lady, she said, "Old woman, why dost thou keep me waiting? Come, give me all the things that Dukhu had from thee. Thou art mad, or thou wouldst not have given them to a wretch like her. Now attend to me, or I will break thy head and thy spinning-wheel." The old lady was both surprised and angry at this mode of address. She told the girl, however, to go to the neighbouring river and bathe. Three times she dipped herself in the river, after which she found her body full of warts, blotches, and sores. Frantic with rage and despair she returned to the old lady, and commenced abusing her, to which the latter said, "Don't blame me, but yourself. Good Dukhu plunged herself into the water only twice, but you dived into it once in excess. Reap the consequence of your folly." Being then shown where the

[1] Cowries are small shells once valued in the Indian market, and exchangeable with coins. Many years ago 80 cowries had the value of a pice.

food was, the girl greedily ate the richest dishes, and, having finished the meal, insolently demanded the delivery of a chest like the one Dukhu had obtained. Being told where it was to be found, she went there, and took up the largest chest within reach. And, forgetful even to bid farewell to her hostess, she ran homeward. Whoever met her on the way shunned her ugly appearance. Her other experiences were equally painful. The horse gave her a kick, the plantain tree threw several bunches of its fruit on her head, and the cow goaded her. After all these humiliations she reached home, panting for breath and half dead.

Her mother, who was wistfully expecting her, fainted at the sight. The chest was, however, some consolation. The mother and daughter, who had heard of the sudden appearance of a very good-looking young man out of Dukhu's chest, expected the like for themselves. They carried it into Shookhu's bedroom, but the girl, feeling very drowsy, put off opening it till the next morning. But her eyes were destined not to see its light. At midnight she cried, "Mother, I feel a torturing pain in the ankles." But her mother replied, "Child, it is nothing. Your prospective husband is putting anklets round them. Have patience, and put them on."

But Shookhu again cried out, "Mother, I feel a shivering all over my body," and again the mother replied, "Child, it is nothing. You are only being decked with ornaments."

After this Shookhu was deprived of the power of utterance, and after passing through unbearable tortures she gave up the ghost. Day dawned and her mother called at her door. But there was no response. Some two or three hours were allowed to pass, it being thought that the girl, worn out by her journey, was still asleep. But when it was nearly midday the door was burst open, and all that remained of Shookhu was a heap of bones, with a snake's cast-off skin beside them. The truth was evident. Shookhu had been

devoured by a snake. The mother, unable to bear this misfortune, killed herself; and thus ended two lives on account of their envy, selfishness, and pride; while Dukhu and her mother, humble and virtuous, enjoyed the special gifts of God all through their lives.

X

A BRAHMIN AND HIS WIFE

THERE once lived a poor and illiterate Brahmin who had a termagant as his wife. One day he asked the lady to make cakes for him, whereupon she said, "What an impudent fellow you are. There is neither a grain of rice nor a drop of oil in the house. O son of a cake-eater, you want to eat cakes. Get out of the house."

Thus grossly insulted the Brahmin left home, and wandered about disconsolately till at length he reached a hermitage, the owner of which, after learning his sad history, detained him and began giving him instruction. After some time the Brahmin with great difficulty mastered the Bengali alphabet, and puffed up with pride sought his own country without the leave or knowledge of the hermit. After travelling under the burning rays of the sun of the month of Bhaddur (the second half of August and the first half of September), which is the hottest time of the year, he at length, one night, reached home. Being curious to know what was going on inside he silently waited in the courtyard, whence he heard the hissing noise of the baking of cakes issuing from within. His mouth watered, and unable to wait any longer he cried out, "My dear wife, are you inside there? I am come, having acquired all the knowledge available in the world." The Brahmini came out, and said that she disbelieved him. To this he replied laughingly, "You certainly doubt the truth of what I say, or you would by this time have

laid a heap of your cakes before me." The wife was thunderstruck. She was at a loss to conjecture how her husband had come to know of the preparation of cakes, and asked him to enlighten her. The request was just the one he had expected, and with gravity he rejoined that he had read astrology and could tell everything that had happened in the wide world. His wife credited what she heard, and ran to the neighbours with the glad tidings. They visited him, and found him with heaps of books beside him. His fame quickly spread all through the country.

Visitors came in crowds, some to show their palms, others to consult him about the thefts committed in their houses; and the answers he gave always satisfied them. One day a *Dhobi* (washerman), Moti by name, who had lost his donkey, visited him with the object of learning what had become of it. The Brahmin was in a difficulty, but by no means at the end of his wits. He told the Dhobi to wait until his morning devotions were over; and then, entering the inner apartment, went out by the back door to see if he could find the donkey grazing in one of the neighbouring fields. But he failed. He was not, however, altogether nonplussed, and coming to the Dhobi he said, "You won't find your donkey to-day. You must wait till to-morrow. My tutelary goddess, *Chundi*, is in a bad humour to-day, and will not favour me." Moti went away satisfied, but the Brahmin passed a very disturbed night in fear lest he should lose his credit and reputation. Towards dawn, however, he heard a noise in the courtyard, and suspecting that it was a thief he held up the light in his hand, when to his joy he beheld the lost donkey lying stretched at full length on the ground. With a trick he made the animal stand up, and tied it to a pole. The next morning the Dhobi came and took away his donkey, wondering with the whole neighbourhood at the superhuman powers of the Brahmin.

Some time after this the king's daughter lost her diamond necklace, worth a million gold mohurs. Many astrologers

were consulted, but to no purpose. At length the Brahmin was sent for. He trembled with fear, and cursed the day on which he had first set himself up as an astrologer. But it could not be helped. The king's summons must be obeyed; and the Brahmin entered the court, seemingly with boldness, but internally as cowed down as a goat led to be sacrificed. He asked two days' time of the king, on the pretext of consulting the gods; and the time being granted, he returned home, not knowing how to extricate himself from the difficulty. He touched no food, took no rest, and shutting himself up in his room, fell prostrate on the ground, calling thus upon his tutelary goddess, "O Mother *Juggodamba* (a name of Durga), save me from death, or at best imprisonment. Is it thy intention that I shall be ruined? Juggodamba, put me into the way of finding out the princess's lost necklace." The Brahmin's stars were in the ascendant, and though we cannot say whether the goddess Juggodamba listened to his prayers or not, there was one that did so, and that was her namesake, the wife of the king's gardener, who, passing by his house, overheard his utterances. She had purloined the necklace and hid it, and she thought that he, having detected this, was demanding of her the restitution of the ornaments. In great terror she ran into his house, clasped his legs, and with tears exclaimed, "Worshipful Brahmin, I adjure you in the name of the gods to spare me. Do not inform the king of my crime, and I will ever remain your slave." Greatly surprised at what he saw, the Brahmin asked her what she meant; at which the woman said, "Father, you have discovered all. I will never commit theft again. Save me out of your pity. Prompted by avarice I stole the necklace, but I am ready to deliver it into your hands." The Brahmin now understood everything; and assuming a very kind tone, told the woman that she need not fear any injury at his hands if she would put the necklace into a *harhi* and deposit it in the tank close to the palace. Happy at escaping punishment she did not delay in carrying

out his instructions even for a moment. Hastening home she did as he had told her.

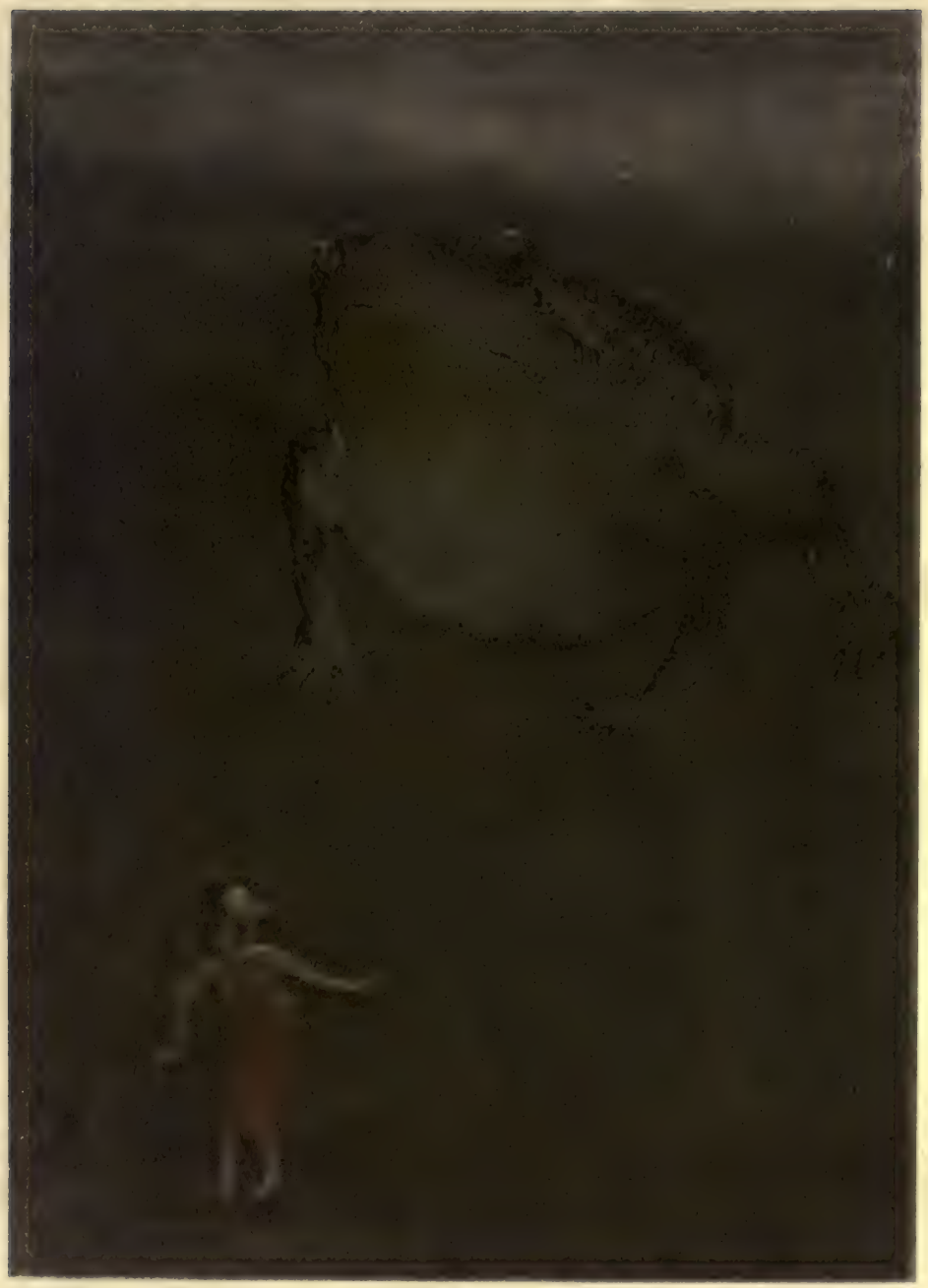
Next day the Brahmin, elated with success, and with his forehead spotted with vermilion, saw the king; and after muttering some unintelligible jargon, told him that the necklace was lying in the tank near to the palace. The king then sent men to fetch it, but it could not be found, even after the minutest search. Who could now look at his wrathful frown without a tremor? The Brahmin was ordered to be put in chains. But he knew that the thief had not deceived him, and he stuck to his former assertion. At his importunity the tank was dragged, and an earthen pot, not a harhi, but a smaller one, was brought up, and the necklace was found inside it. The king and the Brahmin were transported with joy, and the former embraced the latter, appointing him chief scholar in his court. Presents and gifts of the most precious kind were made to him, and he passed his days in affluence. Daily he took his seat in the king's court. No one even of the greatest scholarship could venture to lift up his head in his presence, and the king and queen daily laid flowers at his feet.

XI

A MAN WHO WAS ONLY A FINGER AND A HALF IN STATURE

THERE was once a certain wood-cutter, the barrenness of whose wife was a constant source of distress to him, the more so as all the neighbours pointed at the couple as especially cursed by Heaven. The husband and wife made the richest presents and the sincerest vows to the goddess *Shoshti*, the giver of children ; and she one day appeared before the wood-cutter in the shape of an old lady, and gave him a cucumber, saying that his wife should eat it entire, without leaving the skin even, on the seventh day from that day. The wood-cutter gave it to his wife with these instructions, but she, in her impatience, ate it up the very next day, even forgetting Shoshti's instructions as to the skin. After the usual period of conception, a male child was born ; but the mother was well punished for her disobedience to the goddess. There was hardly anything natural about the child. It was born as a fully developed man, but was only a finger and a half tall, with a tuft of hair behind its head three fingers in length. He could talk and walk from his very birth ; and when not even an hour old he started in search of his father, who had gone out wood-cutting.

He passed through many thoroughfares and through the forest, dispersing at one stroke of his feet the grasshoppers and other insects that waylaid him, till he reached a palace gate, where his father was toiling with great drops of perspiration on the forehead. The boy asked him to go home,



THE MAN WHO WAS ONLY A FINGER
AND A HALF IN STATURE

but he said that having witnessed his child's birth and seen what had happened, he had left home in disgust, and sold himself to the king as a slave, and that therefore it was impossible for him to leave his work. At this, the son went to the king, and asked him to liberate his father. The king was annoyed at the diminutive figure before him, and said that the wood-cutter could be set free only on the payment of *cowries* (money) as his ransom.

Mr. "One-finger-and-half," as his name was, ran out like a ball set in motion to procure the cowries, and in the course of his journey came to a canal which to him seemed impassable. He was thinking how to cross it, when he felt someone pulling from behind at his tuft of hair. By one jerk he freed it from the stranger's grasp, and looking behind saw a frog, which, being interrogated, said that it had for its father the king of frogs, and that its name was *Rung Soondar*. At this the wood-cutter's son burst into a laugh of scorn, and was about to punish the young frog by dismembering it, when it said, "By certain mystical powers I know you to be a wood-cutter's son. Now it does not look well for you to be without an axe. You will get one from a blacksmith yonder, on paying a single cowrie." To which the young man answered, "O brother, I am a child, where shall I get a cowrie? For want of cowries I could not liberate my father. I have nothing in the world, and shall ever remain obliged if you can lend me something." The frog, startled at the request, said he had only a single cowrie, and that one with a hole in it. The suggestion of possessing himself of an axe was pleasing to the dwarf, and thinking little of the impediment, he directed his steps towards the blacksmith's, whom he found to be a man of the stature of two fingers and a half, and with a beard longer by half a finger. He was making an axe and a sickle, each half a finger in length. The boy, without the required cowrie, did not at first know how to proceed. But he hit off a clever plan. He approached the smith with stealthy steps, and, unperceived, tied the tuft

of hair on his own head to the beard of the latter. Then he jumped on the smith's back. The latter, taken by surprise, called on his gods, wondering if he were in the clutches of a ghost or hobgoblin. His aggressor, with sides bursting with laughter, got down, and introduced himself as his best friend. But soft words were useless. The smith in a rage asked if the cowrie, the usual fee for admission into the house, had been brought, and being answered in the negative, clutched his antagonist by the throat, and was on the point of throttling him, when one of the hairs of the latter, still tied to the beard of the former, was torn. The wood-cutter's son threw himself on this account into a frenzy, and demanded of the smith the restoration of the hair, threatening him, in case of refusal, with a legal process. The smith, agitated with great terror, pleaded for mercy, which was granted on his consenting to give up the axe and the sickle when finished. A lasting friendship was then contracted between the parties, and the boy left the place. He came back to the young frog, and was asked by it to cut with his axe a young tamarind tree in the hollow of which its mate was shut up. He complied with the request; but the frog inside, having lost, through long want of exercise, the use of its legs, could not leave the hollow. Master "One-finger-and-a-half," with admirable presence of mind, put his tuft of hair into the hole and drew the frog out. Rung Soondar out of gratitude presented him with the one cowrie it possessed, which it said would suffice to liberate his father; and its mate gave him a few drops of its spittle, saying that with them he could heal the blindness of the daughter of the king whose slave his father was, and so gain her for his wife. He accordingly left the frogs, and journeyed towards the country where his father was. The cowrie the frog had given him multiplied on the way into as many cowries as would amount to a round sum of money, and he went to the king and insolently demanded of him the liberty of his father. The king, counting the cowries and satisfied with their value, promised to meet the demand, but not omitting to give the

impertinent upstart a few slaps on the cheek, and a violent pull at his tuft of hair. But he was not one to be so easily disposed of. He persisted in remaining in the king's presence, and boldly asked him if he had a blind daughter, and if he would marry her to him. The king replied that for certain reasons she could not be married, save in the presence of the corpses of seven thieves separated from his kingdom by thirteen rivers. The dwarf, leaving his father behind, started for the country of the thieves, and after many adventures, reached an ant-hill near it. He could proceed no further, and tired with the long journey, and worn out with hunger and thirst, he fell asleep by the ant-hill. Midnight came, and the thieves of whom he had come in search were out on a pilfering expedition. One of them stumbled upon him, and being awakened, he asked them who they were and where they were going. They told him that they were thieves, and that their present object was to break into the house of his old friend the blacksmith. Anxious for his friend's safety, and for the furtherance of his own ends, he suggested that they would find it more profitable to present themselves before the king living across the thirteen rivers flowing by their country, who intended to give one of them his daughter as wife with a fit dowry. They yielded to the deception, and full of anticipation at the prospect before them, they followed the dwarf as their leader. The thirteen rivers were crossed; and the thieves when about to get down from the last ferry-boat stole some cowries lying hid in one corner of it. The ferry-man and the wood-cutter's son both saw the theft committed, but winked at it for the time being, though in nods and low whispers they communicated to each other their desire for revenge later on.

No sooner had the dwarf reached the palace with the thieves, than the ferry-man presented himself before the king and prosecuted them for the theft of his cowries. They were convicted of the offence, and executed. Whereupon master "One-finger-and-a-half" urged his claims to the hand of the

blind princess. The king, the queen, and the princess herself were loud in their lamentations at the demand of this deformed creature; but the matter could not be helped. The king, according to the conditions he himself laid down, was bound to give away his daughter to that ugly little specimen of humanity. All he could do was to put off the wedding day.

It was within a short time after this that the friends of the seven thieves, getting intelligence of their execution, in a swarm besieged the kingdom, and plundered not only the palace, but all the other houses, reducing the king to the direst poverty imaginable. The dwarf who had enticed their friends into the kingdom and had had them executed, was the object of their keenest search, but he hid himself in a dense patch of grass, and came out only when the coast was clear. He again urged his suit for the princess's hand, and was again put off till the extermination of the race of thieves had been accomplished. For the achievement of this object the dwarf rode away, mounted on a tom-cat, into their country. On the way he made friends with hornets, wasps, and bees, with whom he began an attack which lasted continually for three days, until the thieves, smarting under the poisonous stings of the insects, left the country for good, taking with them their wives and children. Triumphantly returning to the king, he asked him for his father's release and for the hand of the princess. The king could not say "no" any longer, and the dwarf was re-named *Pingal Kumara*. His father was brought into the palace on a decorated chariot with flowers, and he himself was rewarded with the princess's hand, whose sight he restored with the help of the frog's spittle. The wood-cutter's wife was brought into the palace, and lived there as happily as the day was long. Years passed over their heads, until at last the king retired into the forest to prepare himself for death, leaving his dominions to his worthy son-in-law.

XII

THE PETRIFIED MANSION

ONCE upon a time there was a prince who set out on his travels into foreign countries, alone, without taking with him any valuables. His sword was his only companion. He crossed mountains, seas, and rivers, and at length came to a grand mansion. He entered it; and great was his surprise to find petrified forms of men and animals in all the apartments through which he passed. Even the weapons in the armoury were not exceptions. There was in one of the halls a stone statue dressed in royal splendour, surrounded by other statues gorgeously equipped. The lonely house greatly frightened the prince, but just as he was on the point of quitting it he happened to notice an open door. Passing through it he reached the presence of a very beautiful damsel reposing on a *khat* (bed) of gold, and surrounded by lotuses of the same metal. She lay quite motionless and was apparently dead. There was not the softest breath perceptible in her. The prince was enamoured of her beauty and sat with his eyes fixed upon her. But one day he happened to notice a stick of gold near the girl's pillow. He took it up, and was turning it round and round for inspection, when it suddenly touched her forehead; and instantly she started up, fully conscious. The whole house resounded with the clamour of human tongues, the clanking of arms, the songs of birds, and the sounds of domestic animals. It was full of life and joy. Heralds made proclamations, ministers speechified in the court-room, and the king engaged himself in the discharge of his royal duties.

The prince was struck speechless with wonder; and the princess was equally astonished. The servants entered the room, and finding a prince-like youth seated by their master's daughter, hastened to the king with the intelligence. He hurried to the spot, and seeing the prince, asked him who he was. The prince told him ; and the royal family, with all the other inmates of the palace, acclaimed him as their deliverer. They said that the touch of a silver stick had petrified them all, and that their revival was the result of his having touched the princess with the stick of gold. In recognition of the very great service he had rendered them, the prince was rewarded with the princess's hand ; and great were the rejoicings on the joyous occasion.

Meanwhile in his own home his parents mourned for the prince as the years passed and he did not return. The queen had taken to her bed, and the king had become blind with weeping. They were disconsolate, and courted death as the only termination of their great grief. The whole kingdom was overcast with sadness, which was, however, ultimately removed when one day the long-lost prince appeared with his bride. Joyous acclamations rent the air; and the royal couple, being informed of the return of their dear son, hastened out to the gate and embraced him and the princess. At the touch of the stick of gold the king regained his sight, and the queen her health, and they lived for years in the enjoyment of great happiness. At length, leaving the throne to his son, the king with the queen retired to spend a secluded and godly life in the depths of the forest.

XIII

A TRUE FRIEND

A CERTAIN prince once lived in very intimate friendship with a goat-herd. They were always together, and the prince promised his friend that on ascending the throne he would make him prime minister. In course of time the reigning king died, and was succeeded by his son, who in the intoxication of rank and power quite forgot his goat-herd friend. The latter, however, with the intention of calling on him, one day presented himself at the gate of the palace, but he was roughly driven away. The next morning it so befell that the king got up from bed with his whole body from top to toe pierced with needles, and was subject to intense suffering. He could not stand, sit, or lie down without filling the house with groans; and the whole palace was rent with misery out of sympathy for him. The queen's affliction in particular was so great that she passed her days only in heart-rending sighs and sobs.

One day, when she went to bathe in the river that flowed by the palace, she was met by a girl of unrivalled beauty, who petitioned to be kept as a slave and rewarded with the queen's diamond bracelets. The girl's request being granted, she followed her mistress. And when the latter, leaving her clothes on the bank, immersed her head in the water, the former, by some charm, assumed her shape, turning her into an ugly hag. They then returned to the palace, where the wicked girl passed as the queen. Her manners, however, were quite unlike those of the latter. She showed a very cross temper, and cast invectives on those who approached

her. The people, ignorant of the ruse practised on them, were at a loss to account for the changed behaviour of their queen, but they could do nothing except patiently submit to the cruelties inflicted on them. The former queen was not an exception. She could not even see her dear husband. The most humilating work was allotted to her; and she passed her days and nights in weeping.

But better days were in store for her. One day, when proceeding towards the river to wash some of her old clothes, for new ones were never allowed her, she saw a man sitting by the roadside with a heap of bundles of thread before him, and bawling out, "I shall have a good day of it if I can get a thousand needles; the enjoyment of a prince if I have ten thousands; I shall fly triumphantly in the air if I can procure a million." The poor queen, then only a despised servant, was glad at what she heard; and promising to give the man innumerable needles if he would take them, led him to the palace, and managed to obtain for him comfortable quarters. Every one was told why he was there, and he was respectfully received. The next day he told the girl who had usurped the queen's place that it was the day of a certain festival, to be celebrated by the eating of cakes, and asked her to prepare the best ones. She knew that she was not a good hand at making cakes, and so took the assistance of the real queen. They made cakes together; those prepared by the latter being the best of their kind, while those made by the former were of the coarser sort, fit to be eaten only by peasants. All were struck with this difference, but none dared venture any remarks. The stranger, however, addressed the false queen thus: "You, a mere slave, have installed yourself as queen; but now you are caught. You are no other than the vulgar woman that was bought with a *Konkun* (bracelet)." At this the woman, frantic with rage, had the public executioner brought before her, and ordered him to cut off the man's head, as well as that of the real queen, who had introduced him into the royal mansion. The executioner was preparing

to do her bidding when the man, his intended victim, said, "O my bundles of thread, twist yourselves into a thick and strong bond, and with it tie up the executioner's hands." The bundles obeyed their master, and the executioner was rendered powerless. The stranger then commanded some lines of his thread to enter the nostrils of the pretended queen who had ordered him to be killed. They did so, and she fell to the ground senseless. But his work was not yet fully accomplished. He had to free the king from his torments; and so, by a spell, he made each single thread in the bundles get into the eye of each needle that pierced the sufferer's body and draw it out. The exercise of magical power did not end there. The needles with the long thread in the eye of each sewed up the eyes, ears, and lips of the woman who had up to that moment masqueraded as the royal spouse. She fell to the ground and struggled in torture; while the king, having his eyes opened, saw and recognized his old friend the goat-herd, asked his pardon for having neglected him, and appointed him his prime minister. After this the two friends always remained together, the goat-herd entertaining the king in the evenings with the charming music of the flute of gold which the former had given him as a token of affection in the old days of their friendship. The queen, on the return of her former beauty and prosperity, enjoyed a happy and peaceful life, admired and adored by her husband, while the wretched woman who had supplanted her died a miserable death.

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